LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE

PARSHAS CHAYEI SARAH

BY

HESCHEL GREENBERG

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE
ESSAYS ON PARSHAS CHAYEI SARAH

Published by the
Jewish Discovery Center
Institute for Jewish Studies
Copyrighted © by
Rabbi Heschel Greenberg
212 Exeter Road
Williamsville, NY 14221
716-632-0467
716-245-9520
rabbigreenberg@yahoo.com

Dedicated to the Lubavitcher Rebbe, who, more than any Jewish leader, has prepared us for Moshiach and the imminent Redemption

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

1. VISION, MASTERY AND PERCEPTION
2. WOMEN'S ROLE IN JUDAISM
3. GET A LIFE
4. THE TEST
5. A TASTE OF INFINITY
6. INSTANT GRATIFICATION
7. WELCOME BACK
8. THE FOUNTAIN OF YOUTH & A TALE OF TWO HORSES
9. THE COSMIC MARRIAGE
10. ALWAYS READY
11. THE SAME OLD NEW STORIES
12. THE SEARCH AND DISCOVERY OF MARRIAGE
13. CHAIN REACTION I
14. A CHAIN REACTION II

15. THE VEIL

16. TORAH: THE LINK TO THE PAST AND FUTURE

17. OPPORTUNISM

18. SPEAK LITTLE AND FINISH THE JOB

19. PURIM IN CHESHVAN?

20. GO EAST

21. GEULAH AND WOMEN

22. REVERSING ROLES: TWO EULOGIES

B"H

INTRODUCTION

The following collection of essays on *parshas Bereishis* was taken from the weekly Torah messages that I have been sending to hundreds of individuals over the past 22 years.

These messages were written in the spirit of the talks of the Lubavitcher Rebbe. Several of them are actually based on or adaptations of his essays and discourses on the parsha.

The Lubavitcher Rebbe declared that we are living in unique times. He applied the words of the Midrash to our day:

"The time of your Redemption has arrived."

The Rebbe stated further that the straightforward way for us to bring about the actual Redemption is by learning what the Torah says about Moshiach and Redemption. While learning Torah in general has the capacity to change our mindset, learning about Moshiach and Redemption has the capacity to alter of exile-constrained way of thinking and cultivating a liberating manner of thinking.

In this spirit, each one of these messages concludes with an application of the Torah lesson of that week to our

understanding of Moshiach and Redemption, as well as to help us prepare for the coming of Moshiach and the imminent Redemption.

Chayei Sarah is connected to Moshiach because in highlights the unparalleled role women have made to Judaism from Sarah onward.

Sarah, we are told was the first person to undo the harm caused by the Tree of Knowledge, and the modern Sarah's will finish the job of preparing the world for the Messianic Age.

It is my fervent hope that these essays will contribute to the process of changing our *Galus*/exile mindset into a Moshiach mindset, which is effected by the study of these themes in Torah.. And may this effort contribute to the imminent Redemption through our righteous Moshiach. Amen.

ESSAY ONE

VISION, MASTERY AND PERCEPTION

The power of Sarah and of all women is to concretize the ideals of Abraham.

Abraham's bequeathing everything he owned to Isaac was a result of Sarah's insight and foresight that Abraham's legacy would go through Isaac exclusively.

Sarah planted the seed in her lifetime and it finally took root after her passing.

ESSAY ONE

VISION, MASTERY AND PERCEPTION

The Life of Sarah?

There are just a few Torah portions named after individuals. The first is the parsha of Noach, appropriately named after the man from whom all of humanity descends. The second is this week's parsha, entitled Chayei Sarah-the Life of Sarah.

When surveying this parsha we find that it actually does not discuss her life at all but rather the events that occurred in relation to her passing, from her funeral onward. It begins with the purchase of her burial plot and the negotiations between Abraham and Efron regarding the purchase of that plot. Burial is hardly a description of one's life!

Likewise, all the ensuing narratives deal with the aftermath of her life, including Abraham's remarriage to Keturah!

Yet this parsha is, ironically, called Chayei Sarah-the Life of Sarah.

The Rebbe addresses this odd situation and explains that, in fact, all the events of this parsha, although they occurred after and in conjunction with her passing, exemplify what her life was all about.

Concretizing Abraham's Values

One of the highlights of Abraham's life was G-d's promise that he would inherit the Land of Cana'an. This did not materialize during Sarah's lifetime. The first time Abraham actually took full possession of a part of the Land was when he purchased – for full price – the Cave of Machpelah as her resting place. G-d's promise that the Land of Cana'an would go to Abraham and his progeny did not find concrete expression until after, and in relation to, her passing.

This, the Rebbe explains, was the power of Sarah and of all women: to concretize the ideals of Abraham.

Similarly, Abraham's dismissal of his other sons and bequeathing everything he owned to Isaac, as discussed in this parsha, was a result of Sarah's insight and foresight that Abraham's legacy would go through Isaac exclusively. Sarah planted the seed in her lifetime and it finally took root after her passing. In her lifetime, it was not clear if Abraham would grasp her insight that Yishmael and Isaac

were not equal and that only Yitzchak would be the heir to Abraham's legacy.

Abraham only internalized her superior vision, sensitivity and sense of discernment after her passing.

In effect, the Rebbe states, when did we see Sarah's life? In the events that transpired after her and in connection with her passing.

Sarah's Three Powers

If we analyze Sarah's life more specifically, we can discern several features.

First, Sarah was known for her prophetic vision. In fact, the first name she was given was Yiskah, which means she had vision. Rashi explains that she saw things through the prism of her Divine inspiration. So great was her prophetic vision that G-d tells Abraham to listen to her voice: "Whatever Sarah tells you, listen to her voice." Rashi explains that she was superior to Abraham in prophecy.

In short, Sarah was equipped with powerful vision and foresight.

Second, Sarah had incredible mastery over herself and her environment. She had the power to strike at those who wished to defile her in Pharaoh's palace. Abraham, the Zohar tells us, was not concerned about Sarah's safety

when taken by Pharaoh because he knew that she was impervious to the threats from others. The Torah tells us that "G-d struck Pharaoh and his household." Rashi explains that Sarah instructed an angel to strike Pharaoh. She had power over angels and forces of nature.

Moreover, at the beginning of this week's parsha the Torah hints that all of her years were equally good. The Rebbe explains that in truth she had a very difficult life. However, she exhibited so much strength that she was able to exercise control over her reactions and responses to the vicissitudes of her life. While her life resembled a road with many bumps and potholes she rode over life's pathways as if they were perfectly level.

Sarah's power to smooth out the earth on which she travelled foreshadowed the miracle the Jewish people experienced in the desert after the Exodus from Egypt, whereby the Clouds of Glory leveled all hills and mountains, according to the Midrash.

Third, Sarah was endowed with the power of perception and discrimination. She knew the difference between Yishmael and Yitzchak, which only became apparent to Abraham after her passing. She could not tolerate the possibility that Yishmael would inherit along with her son Isaac.

Sarah's Three Names

These three aspects of Sarah are paralleled by the three names that she was given.

Her first name, as stated above, was Yiskah, which highlights her vision and foresight.

The second name, Sarai, which means "My Princess," indicates her mastery over natural forces; she had the power to control not only herself, but also her environment.

Her third name Sarah indicates her exalted level of royalty. Royalty cannot tolerate things that are not befitting a queen. Royalty demands excellence and abhors compromised situations. When the power of royalty is revealed undesirable negative forces disappear. Abraham was associated with royalty himself, but Sarah was the real power behind the throne. Abraham's name means "father of a multitude of nations." It does not mean "king of a multitude of nations," because his power of royalty remained beneath the surface of his fatherly approach. As great and holy as Abraham was he couldn't discriminate between his sons. If left to his own devices, he would have squandered some of his energy on Yishmael, which would have either gone to waste or been diverted into improper places.

If that had occurred, Yitzchak would not have received his due and Abraham's legacy as the progenitor of the Jewish people would not have been realized. And together with the failure to transmit his values and energy to the Jewish people would have been his failure to fulfill G-d's purpose for creating the world: to make a dwelling place for Him. Realization of that purpose hinged on the Patriarchs, who paved the way for the giving of the Torah at Sinai. The Patriarchs' success depended in turn upon the Matriarchs, particularly Sarah, who had the power to protect and enhance Abraham's investment.

Sarah's ultimate power ensured that Abraham's light was channeled to the right place.

Sarah's Three Miracles

These three aspects of Sarah can be said to parallel the three miracles that occurred in her home. These miracles ceased upon her passing, only to be reinstated by Isaacs's marriage to Rebecca.

The first miracle was that her Shabbos candles continued to burn from one Shabbos to the next. Just like the lights of the miracle of Chanukah, her Shabbos lights would not go out on their own.

The second miracle was the blessing in her dough.

And the third miracle was that a cloud, expressing the Divine glory, hovered over her tent.

These three features/miracles reflect the three areas of Sarah's greatness: light, holiness and purity, which, in turn, parallel her three traits of vision, mastery and discrimination.

Light is intimately related to vision. Sarah's prophetic prowess, represented by the name Yiskah, is related to light and clarity of vision.

The blessing in her dough, which is connected to the Mitzvah of separating a piece of dough (Challah) and consecrating it, was a result of her consecrated life. By living a G-dly life one may become master over the physical and natural world. The miracle here was that even a little piece of dough sufficed, just like the Manna from heaven. No matter how small an amount of Manna one collected in the desert, there was always enough to eat.

The cloud that hovered over Sarah's tent indicated that G-d felt comfortable "visiting" her home because the negative influences had been cleared out. Everything was spic and span, clean in every sense of the word.

Sarah and Moshiach

Sarah's role was to counter the reversal caused by Eve when she partook of the forbidden fruit. That transgression caused concealment of the original light, created on day one of Creation, which gave one the ability to see from one end of the world to the other.

Eve's indiscretion also introduced death to the world, granting nature control over our existence.

Her eating the fruit of the forbidden Tree of Knowledge initiated a confusing mixture of good and evil that makes it difficult to discriminate between them.

From Eve's time onward, we have been challenged to reverse that dynamic and lead the world to the Messianic Age. Sarah's three names, characteristics and miracles reversed the three areas of degradation brought on by Eve. Sarah was the first person to make a significant dent in the world's sorry state of decline.

Moshiach's Three Powers

These three characteristics of Sarah are the samples of Moshiach's accomplishments; they are the ultimate manifestation of royalty.

Rambam, in describing Moshiach, writes that he is a "prophet nearly as great as Moses." This parallels Sarah's

prophetic vision. Moshiach will teach Torah to everyone visually because he is endowed with the ultimate in vision.

Moshiach is described as one "who rides on a donkey." The Hebrew term for donkey, *Chamor,* can also be translated to mean the material world. The expression "riding on a donkey" is explained by the Maharal as a reference to his mastery over his own physical body and environment. Moshiach exercises control over himself and his environment.

Moshiach also fights against all negative influences. Moshiach will repair all the breaches and remove all the negative influences from the world.

Where does Moshiach get the power for all of the above?

He inherited it from the Matriarch Sarah.

When the Sarah's of our own generation emulate the three traits of Sarah, light, holiness and purity, they pave the way for Moshiach to reveal those three traits in an even grander form as he ushers in the Final Redemption.

ESSAY TWO

WOMEN'S ROLE IN JUDAISM

Judaism is multifaceted.

If we would want to reduce all of Judaism's goals into just a few categories, it can be said that its objective is threefold.

Judaism is about bringing light, holiness and purity, into our own lives, our homes and to the entire world.

These three ideals are the three traits associated with women in particular.

ESSAY TWO

WOMEN'S ROLE IN JUDAISM

Named After a Woman

When we come across a Torah portion named after a woman, it is only natural to reflect on the Torah's view of women and their role in Judaism. This is obviously the case this week when we read the Torah portion entitled, Chayei Sarah, "The Life of Sarah." One does not have to look much further to find direct references to the unique view Judaism has of the woman and her special qualities.

When Isaac was introduced to his wife Rebecca, the Torah relates he was duly impressed with her, because her presence in his home reminded him of his mother Sarah, and thus the best choice for his partner in life and the Matriarch of the Jewish nation.

Three Miracles

What was it about Rebecca that was so impressive?

To answer this question it is important to examine the way the Torah describes Isaac's marriage to Rebecca:

And Isaac brought her into his mother Sarah's tent, and he married Rebecca.

Rashi explains that Isaac was convinced that Rebecca was a suitable match for him, when he brought her into his home and saw her resemblance to his mother Sarah.

What was it about Rebecca that so reminded him of Sarah?

Our sages tell us that three very special things occurred.

Firstly, our sages tell us that when Sarah was alive, the candles she lit before the *Shabbos* would last, miraculously, until the next Shabbos. They remained lit for an entire week; until she was ready to rekindle them for the next Sabbath. This Chanukah-esque miracle was an expression of the spiritual light that dominated the home in Sarah inhabited.

[Yes, even the Matriarchs knew about the Sabbath and the need to usher it in by lighting candles! According to Talmudic tradition, the Patriarchs and the Matriarchs anticipated the practices of Judaism.]

A second miracle that occurred in Sarah's home was that there was always a blessing in her dough; that there was always more dough than the amount of flour and water she used. This was an expression of the holiness and dedication of the process of Jewish food preparation and is

reminiscent of the laws of Kashrut which instill holiness into our food.

A third most unusual phenomenon associated with Sarah was the presence of a cloud, indicating the presence of G-d, hovering over her home.

This cloud - similar to the cloud that hovered over Mount Moriah to identify the site where Abraham was to sacrifice his son Isaac, and which became the site for the Holy Temple - was G-d's way of saying that this home was a pure home; that there were no moral or spiritual obstacles to G-d's presence there.

With Sarah's passing, notwithstanding the presence of both Abraham and Isaac in this home, these three miracles disappeared.

When Isaac brought Rebecca back into his home, however, these three occurrences resumed. At that point he recognized the uniqueness of his Rebecca that she possessed the same qualities as Sarah and he therefore married her.

What do these qualities symbolize, and why did these miracles not occur when Abraham and Isaac lived there, after Sarah's passing and before Rebecca's rival?

Judaism's Three-Pronged objective

Judaism is multifaceted. If we would want to reduce all of Judaism's goals into just a few categories, it can be said that its objective is threefold.

Judaism is about bringing light, holiness and purity, into our own lives, our homes and to the entire world.

To be sure, all of the Mitzvos (commandments) contribute to the illumination, sanctification and purification of our lives, homes and the world. There are, however, three Mitzvos where these ideals are most pronounced and obvious, because the physical performance of these Mitzvos vividly reflect their spiritual character. And these three Mitzvos are the ones that apply specifically to women:

1) The mitzvah of lighting the *Shabbos* and Holiday candles, before the onset of these holy days.

2) The mitzvah of Challah, separating a piece of dough and dedicating it to G-d. (In Biblical times this would be accomplished by giving it to G-d's servant, the Kohein. Now, we burn the Challah, but the symbolism remains the same. By extension, the Mitzvah of Challah includes all of Judaism's dietary laws, whose objective is to sanctify all of what we eat.

3) The mitzvah of family purity and mikveh, that brings spiritual purity and rejuvenation to the marriage and the Jewish home.

Women's Special Role

According to the Midrash, the one to initiate these three practices and objectives – in a most dramatic fashion – were the Matriarchs, specifically Sarah and Rebecca. Their Shabbos candles illuminated their homes not only on the Shabbos but the entire week. Their dough was blessed because of the sanctity that was instilled into their food. And the cloud that hovered over their home was a sign that G-d felt "comfortable" in their home that was physically and spiritually pure.

These three qualities, purity, light and holiness, are the three traits Judaism asserts are more prevalent among women. Women are better suited to make the home a clean (both physically and spiritually) pure abode for G-d. She is also endowed with the ability to instill light and warmth, holiness and dedication, in ways that the Torah asserts men cannot.

This is certainly the reason that women were given three special Mitzvos of Kashrus (specifically the separation of dough), Family purity (specifically the immersion in the

Mikveh and related laws) and the lighting of the Shabbos candles before the Sabbath.

To be sure, contrary to the myth, women are obligated to fulfill most of the 613 Biblical commandments. The foregoing three are not the only Mitzvos a woman was given. Virtually all of the 613 commandments are applicable to women as they are to men. It is just that women were given these foregoing three Mitzvos with which they are to distinguish themselves. However, these three commandments exemplify a woman's unique status in Judaism. They, and not the men, were given the responsibility to usher in a week of purity, light and holiness.

With the above analysis we can also understand why women were exempted from several of the 613 commandments. It is related to their enhanced connection with light, purity and holiness. All of Judaism rests on the objective of bringing light to the world, purifying it by ridding it of all the negativity and elevating the world to a higher more spiritual and G-dly level.

Since women contribute a disproportionate measure of these three pillars of Judaism they are not in need of some of the Mitzvos that men have to do to accomplish the same goal.

Similarly, our sages tell us it is the women who will usher in the future final redemption, at which time the entire world will be engulfed in purity light and holiness.

Situated in Galus-exile, Divine light is concealed, moral impurity is rampant and the source of Holiness, the Bais Hamikdash-the Holy Temple has still not been rebuilt.

It is therefore the women who observe the three Mitzvos of Shabbos and Holiday candle light, Mikveh and Challah that contribute to the end of Galus and the onset of the true and complete Redemption through Moshiach.

ESSAY THREE

GET A LIFE

Judaism – for all of its great thinkers and theoreticians – would have gotten nowhere without the Sarah's of the Jewish community who devoted their lives to making these noble concepts a tangible reality.

Indeed, this is the main purpose G-d created the world; to take heaven and introduce it to the earth.

ESSAY THREE

GET A LIFE

The Anomalous Name

One of the anomalies associated with this week's parsha is its name. *Chayei Sarah* means "The **life** of Sarah." Yet, the entire portion deals with her death, her burial and events that could have only transpired after her passing, such as Abraham's marriage to Keturah. Why does the name of our Torah portion seem to reflect the very opposite of the theme of this parsha?

The answer lies in a deeper understanding of how Judaism defines life.

> "The righteous, even when they are dead, are called living, whereas the wicked, even when they are alive are considered as dead."

The rationale for this is that the true life of a righteous person is his/her faith in, love of and reverence for G-d. More specifically, the spiritual accomplishments and the contributions, of the righteous represent their true essence. When the righteous person dies, these traits do not diminish. On the contrary, they are enhanced, because they

no longer experience the constraints of the physical body. Their faith, love and reverence grow with every passing day.

Where do we see the life of the righteous manifest itself even after they have physically departed? It is seen in the continuation of their legacy. When their children and students follow in their righteous footsteps, it is an indication that the righteous are very much alive. When their efforts that are comparable to the planting of seeds, begin to sprout and blossom and bear fruit, then you see the dynamics of life.

Very often, righteous people can devote their entire physical life to sowing the seeds. They do not always have the opportunity to see – in their lifetime – the fruits of their labor. When they leave the world and the seeds begin to sprout and even bear fruit, that is when they are even more alive than they were before they physically departed from the world. For after all, these achievements were what their lives were all about.

We can now appreciate why this week's parsha is entitled "The Life of Sarah" though it deals with the events that transpired after she passed away. Virtually all the events recorded in this portion are a result of Sarah's influence.

Three Narratives

Highlighted in this parsha are three narratives: The first is the purchase of the Cave of Machpelah in Chevron for the burial of Sarah. The second is the marriage of Isaac to Rebecca. The third is Abraham's giving all that he possessed to Isaac and sending away his other sons to the east. It is logical to assume that the first narrative concerning the purchase of the Cave of Machpelah, which appears at the beginning of the parsha, very clearly exemplifies Sarah's life.

As we will see, this seemingly necessary and regular act really illustrates the great spiritual accomplishment of Sarah and here effect on Abraham.

Translating Theory into the Concrete

In Sarah's lifetime, G-d had promised Abraham that he would inherit the land. But, in spite of that promise, Abraham had never exercised any real control over the land. G-d's promise to him was never concretized until, Abraham purchased the Cave of Machpelah for Sarah's burial.

In other words, while Abraham was the one who walked the length and breadth of Israel as a way of showing his connection to the land, the connection was not a concrete reality until the purchase.

Translating an ideal from the realm of theory to the realm of reality is what personified Sarah's life. When the Torah talks about Sarah's burial in this week's parsha it is talking about Sarah's **life**, and not her death. Sarah's life was inextricably bound up with transforming the ideals of Abraham into reality. If Abraham was identified with the ideal of the Land of Israel, Sarah was the one whose influence ultimately made it a reality.

The stereotypical view of the woman's role – based on the Talmud -- as one who takes the raw food and cooks it, or the raw fabric and weaves it, has more to it than its literal application.

The ideal woman – the Sarah of today – is the one who is able to take the loftiest ideals and introduce them into the world of reality. Judaism – for all of its great thinkers and theoreticians – would have gotten nowhere without the Sarah's of the Jewish community who devoted their lives to making these noble concepts a tangible reality. Indeed, this is the main purpose G-d created the world; to take heaven and introduce it to the earth.

A Woman's Dedication to the Land of Israel

Moreover, throughout history, especially in Biblical times, the men rarely exhibited dedication to the Land of Israel. The Biblical spies, for example, were satisfied to lead a

spiritual life in the desert. The women were always the driving force behind the acquisition of Israel and preserving our ties to the land. All this began with Abraham's purchase of Sarah's burial plot.

The Two Stages of History

Jewish history can be divided into two stages: The pre-Messianic period, when all of the loftiest ideals appear elusive. It doesn't seem to us – despite all of the efforts – that the world has changed in a real concrete sense. People are still at each other's throats. In the next stage – the Messianic Era – all of our hopes, aspirations and efforts will pay off, they will be concretized and will become a down-to-earth reality.

If there are any spiritual distinctions between men and women, it is that men are satisfied with the theory and the **pursuit** of noble ideas. Women want their full implementation. Men are driven by and satisfied with the adventure of the effort, women are driven by the desire to see their dreams come true.

It is therefore no surprise that our sages tell us that it is in the merit of the women that the future Redemption and Messianic Era will commence. The feminine approach of not being distracted by the (mere) *pursuit* of noble ideas, of not being satisfied until those ideas – as elusive as they may

seem – are implemented, is what the Messianic Age is all about.

ESSAY FOUR

THE TEST

Pro-active compassion is where one cannot bear to keep the resources they possess for themselves.

A truly kind and compassionate person's need to give, prompts him to become a pro-active giver who seeks out others who are in need.

It is not his own pain that he is trying to assuage, but he is in pain when he cannot give of himself to others

ESSAY FOUR

THE TEST

Eliezer's Gamble

When Eliezer, the Patriarch Abraham's servant, was sent to Aram Naharayim to find a suitable match for Isaac, Eliezer's test for the suitable girl (who turned out to be the Matriarch Rebecca) was rather unusual.

> "Behold, I stand by the fountain of water; and the daughters of the men of the city come out to draw water. So let it come to pass, that the maiden to whom I shall say: Let down your pitcher, I pray thee, that I may drink; and she shall say: 'Drink, and I will give your camels drink also.' Let her be the one that You have appointed for Your servant, for Isaac, and thereby shall I know that You have shown kindness unto my master."

If Eliezer would have said, "the first maiden that would ask 'where are you from?' will be the girl that G-d had intended for Isaac," or some other similar statement, it

would have been an arbitrary and capricious way of determining who should marry Isaac.

Now, however, that Eliezer was making his determination as to who should be Isaac's match on the basis of an act of kindness, it was not arbitrary at all. After all, kindness is a trait that was the hallmark of Abraham's family.

But a question can still be asked. Wouldn't it have sufficed if the girl would have kindly acceded to his request for some water? Why did he have to add on the provision that she would also offer to provide water for his camels? Isn't the act of helping a stranger proof enough of her kindness?

Furthermore, if Eliezer really wanted to see the true extent of her kindness, he should have said, "which ever maiden will offer to give me something to drink." Isn't unsolicited kindness a more meaningful form of kindness?

Two Forms of Kindness

To answer this question we must discern between two opposite motivations of kindness. On the surface they may appear identical, but when we probe beneath the surface, we will realize that they are truly two distinct forms of kindness.

The first and lower form of kindness and compassion is motivated by seeing the needs of others. When we see

another person's suffering we cannot bear it and we respond by doing something to help remove the other's pain. This form of compassion, however worthy it may be, is not real compassion. If one were never to have seen the other's suffering and degradation, it would never have occurred to him to look and find these people who are in need and help them. Only when their pain comes to our attention, do we then react. This form of reactive kindness is actually not an expression of compassion for others, but really a way of allaying one's own pain and discomfort.

Pro-active compassion is where one cannot bear to keep the resources they possess for themselves. To use a Talmudic metaphor: "A cow wants to nurse its offspring more than the offspring wants to be nursed." A truly kind and compassionate person's need to give, prompts him to become a pro-active giver who seeks out others who are in need. It is not his own pain that he is trying to assuage, but he is in pain when he cannot give of himself to others

This was the hallmark of Abraham. When he was recovering from circumcision, he was sitting outside his tent hoping to be able to invite some hapless wayfarer into his tent. His pain at not being able to help another human being was greater than the physical pain that followed his surgery.

Pro-active Rebecca

If "the girl" that was to become the wife of Isaac, Abraham's son, was to prove that she was a pro-active giver, it would not have sufficed for her to have volunteered giving Eliezer something to drink. Her generosity might have been aroused by her seeing the famished condition of Eliezer and not by a pure desire to help others.

Eliezer therefore stipulated that the girl who would offer to go beyond compassion for the weary traveler, but would also want to do even more acts of kindness, she is the one who is endowed with the Abraham trait of pure and unadulterated kindness.

G-d's Pro-active Kindness

G-d also displays two modes of kindness. Creation of the world, we are told, is a product of G-d's kindness. But that kindness existed even before there was a need for it; it was pro-active. On the other hand, the kindness that we are in need of now that we are in exile is motivated by the pain that G-d "experiences" when He sees His children suffering.

When Moshiach will usher in a new age of Divine revelation and there will be no more poverty and suffering, G-d's benevolence will once more not merely be of the

reactive mode, but as in the beginning of creation, it will be pro-active — pure and unadulterated kindness. G-d will give not because we need, but because He desires to give.

Our pure and pro-active acts of goodness kindness are the catalysts that will usher in the Messianic Age of pure and unrestricted G-dly goodness and kindness.

ESSAY FIVE

A TASTE OF INFINITY

Whereas in the present day and age we experience intermittent spurts of growth and a taste of infinity, in the future Messianic Age infinite growth will become an integral part of our lives.

ESSAY FIVE

A TASTE OF INFINITY

A Lesson in Contrasts

Our Talmudic Sages have taught us a lesson in contrasts. In last week's Torah portion, Abraham offers his guests a little bread to sate their hunger and then proceeds to give them a lavish feast fit for a king. This teaches us how we should "promise a little and do a lot."

By contrast, in this week's parsha, Efron graciously offers to give Abraham the plot that he wished to purchase for the burial of his wife Sarah without remuneration. And, in the end, he asks for an exorbitant amount. Once more, our Sages declare, that we should not be like Efron who promises a lot and does very little.

One can raise the obvious question: What is wrong with just promising whatever one wishes to promise and keeping it? Not more or less. Why does it have to go from one extreme (Efron's) to the other (Abraham's)?

On the surface one could suggest that the desirability of making modest promises is based on considerations of

modesty. Since mere words don't actually help anyone, why should one advertise their magnanimity? It can be misconstrued as bragging.

However, it is more plausible to suggest that there is some intrinsic value to "promising a little and doing a lot" beyond the dictate of humility.

Beyond Humility

To understand the value of always doing more than what one promised, we should refer to the Talmudic principle that we highlight during the upcoming festival of Chanukah: *"Ma'alin bakodsesh*, one must always ascend in matters of holiness."

Implicit in this principle is the notion that a human being ought not to stay on one level, specifically, with respect to matters of holiness.

Every human being has ambition; some more and some less. But what separates us from all other of G-d's creatures is the desire to grow, health wise, financially, emotionally and intellectually.

Why do we have this desire? What is wrong with staying on one level?

The Uniqueness of the Human Soul

The answer lies in a better understanding of our inner dynamics. We—as all other creations—are finite beings. But we were all created and continue to be created by an infinite G-d.

However, while the Divine spark within all other creatures is securely ensconced within the creation, **we** were created with an "anomaly." Our Divine spark—that we refer to as our soul and is a part of the infinite G-d—can never be fully contained. Some people frequently feel their soul's invitation to them to reach greater spiritual heights. In others, the spark that is felt sporadically jolts them to seek more out of, at least, some aspect of life.

The common denominator in all humans is that they are driven by an inner force that is reflective of the infinite nature of G-d.

The Search for Spiritual Growth

When the soul voice resonates within our psyche, we hear its message and it reads as follows: "While ambition is good in all of the important aspects of life, the one area that is truly what I, the soul, is looking for, is spiritual growth."

For those whose inner soul's voice is muffled, they will feel only the urge to be ambitious. The bad news is that they

will inevitably come to the realization that their ambition is not really making their lives more meaningful, because it is not consistent with the soul's real reason for having this ambition in the first place. Once this realization sets in, the individual will frequently experience feelings of depression and begin to regress

The good news for these ambitious people, however, is that as long as there is life there is hope. A person who loses the desire to grow in any area will hardly search for growth in the area that counts the most. Once we have ambition, however, we can steer it in the right direction.

We can now understand why it is so important to follow the example of Abraham and "promise a little and do a lot," rather than to simply promise much and keep the promise. The idea is not just to make modest promises, so as to not sound conceited, but it is our way of appreciating the need for continual growth.

The Lesson from Chanukah

The amount one begins with is not as important as the ability to make a quantum leap to a higher level. As with regard to the lights of Chanukah, the fact that we go from one candle to two the next night, and so on, is more powerful than if we would have kindled all eight candles each of the eight nights of Chanukah. To light eight lights

nightly would be great, but to start with one and to continually increase the number of candles is to flirt with infinity.

Whereas in the present day and age we experience intermittent spurts of growth and a taste of infinity, in the future Messianic Age infinite growth will become an integral part of our lives. Whatever constraints that life in exile places on our ability to truly experience the infinite nature of G-d, will be removed in the future Redemption.

ESSAY SIX

INSTANT GRATIFICATION

Our prayers are replete with requests for G-d to bring an end to suffering and misery; and end to the exile.

These prayers are punctuated with an urgency. The word "speedily" appears in many of these requests.

When we deal with a mission that will affect the entire world, there is not luxury to delay.

Every minute the process of Redemption is delayed; there is more misery and suffering in the world.

Simple sensitivity demands that we demand that G-d bring us Moshiach immediately.

ESSAY SIX

INSTANT GRATIFICATION

Eliezer's Presumptuous Behavior

Eliezer, the servant of Abraham, was sent by his master to the city of Charan to find a wife for his master's son, Isaac.

When he arrived there he prayed to G-d that he would be successful. But Eliezer was not content to be successful, he asked G-d to grant him success "today!"

One can raise a question about Eliezer's behavior. We can easily understand his prayer for success. After all, success is in G-d's hands. But why did he pray that it happen that very day? Wasn't it presumptuous and brazen on his part to ask for, what amounted to, instant success?

The answer to this question lies in a better appreciation for the value in performing a Mitzvah. Eliezer was carrying out what amounted to one of the most pivotal missions in the history of the world. Eliezer was the one who made the match between Isaac and Rebecca—the very first Jewish marriage in the Torah. Indeed, it is the very first Jewish

marriage period. Abraham was married to Sarah before he was circumcised; before G-d made a special covenant with him and established him as the father of a new nation. This marriage represented the continuity of Abraham's ideal, without which there would not be a Jewish people.

One can now gain some appreciation as to the weight that Eliezer ascribed to his mission. If Eliezer had not realized this fact himself, he surely became aware of it when Abraham gave all that he possessed to Isaac for the purpose of his marriage.. If this had been an ordinary marriage, Abraham would not have given everything away. Since this was the paradigmatic marriage of the Jewish people, he invested all his material and spiritual resources that it succeed.

We can also better understand why the Torah devotes so much space to the story of Eliezer. This story is the very foundation of the Jewish nation and deserves to be presented in vivid and exciting detail.

We can now also understand why Eliezer was so eager to realize success that very day. This was not an ordinary mission for this was not an ordinary marriage; it was an event that the world had waited for from its very creation and would have repercussions for all of the future.

Union of Two Dynamic Souls

Moreover, in the writings of Kabbalah we are taught that the union between Isaac and Rebecca was representative of the union of two dynamic spiritual energies. This is a most powerful spiritual combination, so much so, that it unleashes the energy needed to bring about the ultimate Redemption.

Eliezer, sensing the seriousness of his mission could not afford to waste a day. Every day the mission is completed, the world would be a day closer to realizing the purpose for which it was created — to cultivate a Jewish nation that would accept the Torah and serve as a light unto all the nations, leading inexorably to the Messianic age, when all nations will live together in harmony.

Thus, Rashi comments on Eliezer's monologue: "And I've arrived today..," that Eliezer miraculously arrived the very same day that he left. Why was it so important to have this miracle occur?

No Time to Waste

In light of the above analysis it is clear that G-d was the one to have signaled to Eliezer as to the crucial nature of his mission; there was no time to waste. Eliezer, took his cue from G-d and the miracle of arriving the same day he

left, to ask G-d that his mission be completed in one day. There was simply no time to waste.

Our prayers are replete with requests for G-d to bring an end to suffering and misery; and end to the exile. We implore G-d to bring Moshiach who will restore the Temple and bring justice and peace to the world. Yet, these prayers are punctuated with an urgency. The word "speedily" appears in many of these requests. Why the need to put a "rush" order on our desire to have Moshiach come?

The answer is that when we deal with a mission that will affect the entire world, there is not luxury to delay. Every wasted moment means that someone's life is far from being what it ought to be. Every minute the process of Redemption is delayed, there is more misery and suffering in the world. Simple sensitivity demands that we demand that G-d bring us Moshiach immediately.

We Want Moshiach Now!

We live in a generation that can get everything instantly. While some of us might decry the need for instant gratification, instant access to the Internet etc., there is a reason why our generation has the capacity to do things instantly and without much delay. We are living in the age when the need for Moshiach is one that demands

immediate attention. It behooves us to utilize the desire for instantaneous considerations of our needs for the accessing of that which is good and holy. Yes we should be impatient when it comes to even one single person's suffering, how much more so when it is the suffering of millions.

We can now appreciate the slogan: "We want Moshiach now!" It is our modern world's way of saying, if I can have my TV go on with the flick of a switch, as well as so many other things, then it is time for us to see the imminent revelation of G-d through his righteous leader-the Moshiach. May we see his coming, imminently, now!

ESSAY SEVEN

WELCOME BACK

Abraham's influence did not go to waste.

His father Terach and his son Yishmael did return to Abraham's ways.

Hagar too did eventually return to Abraham a righteous woman.

ESSAY SEVEN

WELCOME BACK

The Controversy Surrounding Abraham's Third Wife

After Sarah's passing, Abraham remarried. However, the identity of his new wife is a subject of some controversy. According to Rashi, *Keturah* — the name she is given in this week's *Parsha* — was none other than Hagar, Sarah's maidservant, whom Abraham had married and who bore him his first son Yishmael.

Rashi explains that the reason she was now called Keturah was because her deeds were as beautiful as incense, which is *Ketore*t in Hebrew. In addition, the word Keturah means "tied up," because ever since she left Abraham she did not have relations with any other man.

The question can be asked, why Rashi feels compelled to explain that Keturah was really Hagar, the wife Abraham had previously sent away, and that her name Keturah was not her real name?

Understanding Abraham's Life's Work

The answer, provided by the Rebbe, lies in a better understanding of Abraham's life's work.

In all of the preceding narratives about Abraham, especially the one's recounted in the Oral tradition of Judaism, Abraham's ideal was to spread the word that there was only one G-d and the need to follow in G-d's ways of justice and righteousness. From his earliest youth, Abraham destroyed idols and influenced countless people to follow in his footsteps.

Everyone who came in contact with Abraham was infected by his faith, kindness and righteousness. Even the most unrefined people did not remain the same, when they came in contact with Abraham.

Why Not Influence his Own Family?

All of this begs the obvious question. If Abraham was such a powerful influence on all the strangers with whom he had contact, even the lowliest classes of people, why couldn't he have the same influence on his own family members? Why did he bear a child Yishmael who had to be sent away from home because of his recalcitrant behavior? Why did he have to send away his wife Hagar? Why didn't the many years that he spent with her rub off on her?

In truth, Rashi already answered the question concerning Yishmael. Rashi comments that Yishmael eventually returned to his father Abraham a changed person. This is why, Rashi, in this week's Parsha, explains, the Torah mentions Isaac's name before that of Yishmael when they came to bury their father. Yishmael, though he was the senior of the two, conceded the role of Abraham's heir to his younger brother Isaac.

Even Abraham's father, Rashi informs us in another comment, did Teshuvah. Abraham's rebelliousness against his father's idolatrous ways, eventually paid off. *Terach* realized that his son Abraham was right in rejecting idol worship and he too became a monotheist.

Insofar as Hagar, however, the question that we raised still persists. Why was she not responsive to Abraham's inspiration?

This question, that should disturb anyone who studies the Torah and is aware of Abraham's prowess in inspiring others, is what Rashi is really addressing in his comment on Keturah. Rashi says: "**This** is Hagar." In other words, Rashi is informing us that we were right. Abraham's influence did not go to waste. Hagar did eventually return a righteous woman and that is why she was called Keturah because her deeds were both pleasant to G-d.

In addition, she also maintained her faithfulness and loyalty

to Abraham.

No Good Effort goes to Waste

One of the lessons from this narrative is that no good effort goes to waste. Even when we do not see the immediate positive effects of our actions, we must realize that eventually the world will change for the good due to our efforts.

Some people raise the question how we can believe that Moshiach will imminently come and usher in an age of peace and holiness? In light of the above analysis, the question should be reversed. How come so many thousands of years of spiritual influence have not borne fruit? Why has the Age of Redemption not yet arrived considering the incredible volume of goodness that our forebears have generated?

And the answer is that, indeed, Moshiach's arrival is imminent. All of the good will finally pay off.

ESSAY EIGHT

THE FOUNTAIN OF YOUTH & A TALE OF TWO HORSES

ESSAY EIGHT

THE FOUNTAIN OF YOUTH & A TALE OF TWO HORSES

The Uniqueness of Sarah

Sarah's passing is reported briefly in the beginning of this week's parsha in the following manner:

> "And these were the days of Sarah, one hundred years, twenty years and seven years…"

Rashi raises the obvious question, why doesn't the Torah consolidate the three components of Sarah's life by stating that she lived: "One hundred and twenty seven years?" Why does it separate the twenty years from the hundred and the seven years from the twenty?

Rashi's answer is that the Torah wishes to express the uniqueness of Sarah, that when she was a hundred years old she was as righteous as she was at the age of twenty, and that she was as beautiful at the age of twenty as she was at the age of seven.

A Hundred like Twenty

Commentators are puzzled at Rashi's comparison of a hundred year old to a twenty year old with regard to sin. Shouldn't it have stated that when she was twenty — at the peak of her youth — she was just as righteous as she was at the age of 100. Aren't twenty year old people more prone to sinning than 100 year old people?

To answer this question we should examine the dynamics of the aging process as it pertains to human development.

The older we become the more difficult it is for us to change.

Furthermore, even when we do change, the change is not as radical as the changes we can experience in our youth. Consequently, the older we get, the more ingrained are our negative traits, albeit with less intensity and youthful zeal.

As our body ages and cannot keep up with the pace of activity, the negative traits become more ingrained, even as on the surface it appears as if we have become more docile and refined. The refining process is unfortunately only on the surface

By contrast, a younger person might express his or her negative traits more energetically, but beneath the surface there is more fluidity. This enables young people to change their negative ways with relative ease.

A Ba'al Shem Tov Story

A story is told of the Ba'al Shem Tov (Another version of this story I heard was told in the name of the third Lubavitcher Rebbe, the Tzemach Tzedek), who was once invited to a family celebration. The hosts sat him next to a distant relative who was brilliant, but had strayed from the path of Judaism. This young rebel braced himself for a sermon from the Ba'al Shem Tov about his errant behavior. But to his surprise the Ba'al Shem Tov said nothing the entire meal.

Before parting, the Ba'al Shem Tov startled his relative by asking him the following question:

> "Which, in your opinion, is better, a young, strong and healthy horse or an old, sick and lame horse?"

The young rebel was puzzled at the Ba'al Shem Tov's bizarre question and replied:

> "What kind of a question is that? Of course, a healthy horse is preferable to a lame one?"
>
> "But,"

the Ba'al Shem Tov persisted.

> "Isn't a lame horse better, because if it were to stray off the path, it can't go too far?"
>
> "On the contrary," the young rebel contested, "A

> healthy horse, even if it strays, will be able to return just as quickly."

The Ba'al Shem Tov, concluded, "Aha, so a healthy horse can always return to the right path more quickly…"

Sarah's Moral Agility

Thus, Sarah's greatness was that when she was 100 years old, her underlying character was still as fluid as it was when she was twenty. Not only was she righteous in terms of her behavior, but even the subconscious dimension of her personality was as vibrant as it was at her prime. If she had any spiritual "weaknesses" lying beneath the surface, she was as morally "agile" when she was 100, in her ability to change and even grow.

Most people at that age would be like the "lame horse" that couldn't stray very far, but couldn't change for the good and improve either. Sarah, conversely, was like the "healthy horse," always capable of racing, changing and growing.

The prophet Isaiah (65:20) declares that in the Messianic Era, "a youth will die at the age of 100." In addition to the promise of longevity inherent in this prophecy, this verse wishes to convey a deeper spiritual message as well:

In the Messianic Era, all of us will experience the same

youthful characteristic of Sarah. Even as we age, our inner spirit for change and growth will not be stifled. Even the hundred year old person, will still be a youth at heart.

ESSAY NINE

THE COSMIC MARRIAGE

A marriage is not merely a contract between two parties.

Besides all the legalities that a marriage involves—financial support, etc.—it is the act by which two half souls commit themselves to one another unconditionally, in ways that transcend logic and reason.

Marriage is not a quid-pro-quo contractual relationship.

In marriage one accepts the totality of the other, not just the specific qualities that the other brings to the relationship.

ESSAY NINE

THE COSMIC MARRIAGE

The Prototypical Marriage

The marriage between Yitzchak and Rivkah recounted in this week's parsha is the first Jewish marriage mentioned in the Torah. It is seen as the prototype of all subsequent marriages, including the cosmic marriage between G-d and the Jewish people that occurred at Sinai.

Commentators raise a question about the legality of both marriages:

When Yitzchak married Rivkah, he did so by way of a proxy. Abraham dispatched his trusted servant Eliezer to serve as Yitzchak's agent to betroth Rivkah to his son. According to the Midrash, when Eliezer gave Rivkah jewelry it was not just a gift but was in lieu of the wedding ring that we currently use to execute a legal marriage. Yitzchak was thus married to Rivkah without even showing up at his own wedding!

Jewish law allows for the possibility of executing a marriage by way of proxy. However, it forbids this manner of

marriage except in dire circumstances. The main reason for this objection is that there is the danger that a man might find something unappealing and repugnant about his wife (or vice versa).

Based on this legal premise, a question has been raised: How could Abraham—whom our Sages state anticipated the commandments of the Torah and observed them—violate the law that forbade his son from marrying a woman without seeing her first? Why did he send his servant to execute the marriage by proxy?

A Similar Question

We can find the answer to this question by referring to a similar question about the giving of Torah, which, as mentioned above, represented the marriage of G-d to His bride, the Jewish people.

Here too, commentators ask, how could G-d have initiated this marriage by way of Moshe, who served as His proxy to give the Torah to the Jewish people?

To better understand the question, we must first observe that G-d, who is all-seeing, certainly was well acquainted with the Jewish people before He gave them the Torah. The commentators' question is premised on the idea that the methods G-d used to bring about His marriage with the

Jewish people should parallel the way we are to enter into a marriage with each other. G-d shows us, by example, how we are to conduct ourselves in similar situations. Hence, if G-d used a proxy to marry His people, it would suggest that there is nothing wrong with that approach. And, conversely, it may be argued, just as we do not tolerate marrying sight-unseen by way of a proxy, so too it is to be expected that G-d's marriage to us should not have occurred through a proxy.

The answer to this question sheds light on how Eliezer could have served as a proxy for Yitzchak's marriage to Rivkah.

The Rationale

As stated, the rationale for the law that forbids marrying without first seeing the bride is the concern that the husband might find his wife repugnant and cause him to be repulsed by her. The mere possibility of this occurring renders marriage by proxy a fundamentally flawed method of marriage.

To explain: a marriage is not merely a contract between two parties. Besides all the legalities that a marriage involves—financial support, etc.—it is the act by which two half souls commit themselves to one another unconditionally, in ways that transcend logic and reason.

Marriage is not a quid-pro-quo contractual relationship. One's motive for marriage is not restricted to his or her appreciation for the other's talents and virtues. In marriage one accepts the totality of the other, not just the specific qualities that the other brings to the relationship.

Nevertheless, a marriage cannot take place without courtship, at which time one is exposed to the other's talents, virtues and qualities. One chooses a mate based on the things about the other that he or she finds appealing. More specifically, one looks for compatibility. However, one should view the effort=of finding the person who both possesses these virtues and is compatible as just the removal of the hurdles that one must go over before finding his or her *bashert*; in other words, his or her other half.

In addition, as we are limited human beings, we would find a marriage hard to accept if our only connection with the other was a soul-connection while on all other levels a couple is incompatible. A marriage is about connecting to the other on all levels, from the most spiritual to the external and physical. To connect on the highest and deepest level, one must be able to connect on the lower and external levels as well. One is a stepping stone to the other.

If, from the outset, one's marriage has the potential to deteriorate because the husband will eventually find his wife unappealing, that points to a fundamental flaw in the union. Their bond must transcend their respective superficial flaws. For that to happen, initially there must be a sense of compatibility.

A Marriage that Lasts Forever

When G-d married us at Sinai, He embraced us unconditionally. His connection to us transcends the specific expressions of loyalty and devotion that we made to Him. Unlike humans in their relationships, no matter how far a Jew strays from G-d, He will never truly despise us and find us contemptuous. This notion can be found in numerous verses in the Torah. One instance where this is enunciated is in the very section of the Torah where G-d expresses His displeasure with our iniquitous behavior and threatens us with severe retribution for our errant ways. Even so, by the end of that section (*Vayikra* 26:44) G-d continues: "But despite all this (above-mentioned punishment), while they are in their enemies' land, I will not despise them and become disgusted with them to annihilate them, breaking My covenant with them." In other words, the covenant that G-d made with us can never be severed. G-d did not have to "see" us prior to the

marriage because that preliminary step was not necessary for G-d since He will never abandon us no matter what.

The Mountain of Unconditional Love

Our Sages state that G-d lifted Mount Sinai over our heads and threatened to drop it on us if we refused to take the Torah. Chassidic thought explains that this was not coercion in the classical sense of the word. Rather it means that G-d enveloped us with so much love that we cannot ever sever our relationship with Him, just as He promised never to sever His relationship with us. That hovering mountain of love defines our marriage with G-d.

When a person enters into a relationship which is so fundamentally strong that nothing can tear it asunder there is no danger that one spouse will find the other repulsive.

A Marriage that was Made in Heaven for All to See

How does one know that a marriage will last and never lose its original ardor? When G-d Himself arranges that marriage. While all marriages are made in heaven, we usually only can see that in retrospect. When, however, we can see G-d's hand in a marriage at the very outset, demonstrating that the bond between the couple is a

sacred one blessed by G-d Himself, we can then know with confidence that the relationship is an expression of divine connectivity.

Where do we find such a marriage? The marriage of Yitzchak to Rivkah. There, the hand of G-d was clearly visible at every step of the way. As recounted in this week's parsha, the fortuitous and miraculous way Eliezer found Rivkah prompted even her wicked brother and father to exclaim: "This thing has come from G-d! We cannot refuse you…" In the Midrashic account of these events, many more miracles are cited in connection with Eliezer's journey and discovery of Rivkah. There was no question but that G-d orchestrated these events to make this prototypical marriage take place. In light of G-d's blessings, it was evident that nothing could undermine this marriage.

The Final Stage of the Marriage

As mentioned, this ideal marriage was the forerunner of and paradigm for the marriage between G-d and Israel at Mount Sinai.

The giving of the Torah is likened to a marriage because, like a marriage, the objective of Torah is to create a union: between G-d and the Jewish people, the physical and the spiritual, the body and soul and the union of all of the world's inhabitants to serve G-d as one.

This marriage will not be complete until the coming of Moshiach and our final Redemption from exile. Marriage, according to Jewish law, is comprised of two stages: The first is *Kiddushin*, which is often translated as betrothal. The second stage, *Nisu'in*, is the ceremony that takes place under the *chupah*-the wedding canopy, after which the marriage may be consummated. As Rashi notes, in ancient times, there was a ten or twelve month period between the betrothal and the final stage of the marriage. During that period, the bride remains with her family and spends her time making all the preparations for the wedding.

The marriage between G-d and Israel that occurred at Sinai, describes the *Kiddushin* stage of our deep relationship. The giving of the Torah at Sinai was akin to the giving of the ring at a wedding. That event connects us to our spouse but does not represent the ultimate union. The final stage of the marriage between G-d and the Jewish people, and all the ensuing forms of unity that our marriage will generate, will take place imminently, with the coming of Moshiach and the final Redemption.

As long as we are in exile, we might erroneously think that our marriage with G-d might have become strained and compromised. With the imminent arrival of Redemption, this misconception will be corrected for all time. We will see how G-d's relationship with us transcends all considerations. As the Rebbe declared on many occasions:

"No Jew will be left behind!" It will become demonstrably clear that even during our long exile, G-d's love for us was and continues to be unconditional.

ESSAY TEN

ALWAYS READY

Mincha takes place smack in middle of the work day.

We have neither the luxury of the preparation of Shacharis nor the detachment of Ma'ariv.

Our minds are racing with thoughts about what has transpired and what will happen in the next few minutes.

One has to be on a much higher spiritual plane to be able to be in the world and be capable of rising above it without much time to change one's mindset.

ESSAY TEN

ALWAYS READY

The Patriarchs and the Three Daily Prayers

This week's parsha discusses how Rebecca, who was chosen to be Isaac's wife, met Isaac for the first time. This momentous meeting was responsible for the future of the Jewish people, and therefore, every detail is pregnant with symbolism and guidance for us.

The Torah states:

> "And Isaac went out into the field to speak/pray towards evening."

According to the Talmud, Isaac's going out to the field was to pray the afternoon-Mincha—service. Indeed, the Talmud states, it was Isaac who instituted the Mincha prayer. Abraham instituted the morning service known as Shacharis, and Jacob instituted the evening prayer.

The connection of Abraham to the morning service can be understood in light of Abraham's penchant for doing things with dispatch. Thus Abraham wakes up early to pray. Abraham was the personification of the twin

attributes of kindness and love. A kind person is always looking for ways to go out of his own cocoon and help others. A loving person is a person who does not stay in one place waiting for the object to his love to come to him. Rather he goes out and searches for the person.

Thus Abraham is identified with Shacharis, the prayer that expresses our love for G-d as soon as we wake up in the morning. Abraham was full of energy and passion and it is reflected in his waking up early to institute and pray the Morning Prayer.

Jacob lives a very difficult life, which begins after he was compelled to flee because his brother Esau wanted to kill him after he took his father's blessings. And at that point, in a dark period of his life, Jacob recognizes the need to express his faith in G-d who he trusts will come to his aid. The evening service that we pray when it is dark is when we express our dependence on Him precisely when it is dark and gloomy.

We must try to understand why Isaac was the one to institute the Mincha-afternoon service? What is so special about Mincha and what is its connection to Isaac?

The Connection of Mincha to Isaac

One way of understanding the connection between Isaac and Mincha is by way of a story:

Two great rabbis (R. Schenur Zalman and R. Levi Yitzchak) were together at a family celebration. The first holy rabbi prayed his morning prayers early in the morning, while the other prayed his morning prayer rather late in the day, only after much spiritual preparation.

One of the participants in the celebration noticed the different approaches to the morning service these two holy men took. He took the initiative and asked the rabbi who prayed early why he hadn't followed the example of his colleague who spent much time in preparing for his prayers. The rabbi's response was, "How can you compare me to my colleague? He is so holy that whenever he comes to pray before G-d he is allowed in and his prayers will be accepted. I'm not that worthy, so I have to pray during the allotted time for prayer."

The participant then when to the other rabbi and posed the question to the other rabbi as to why he prayed so late, beyond the time designated for the morning prayers. Why hadn't he followed the example of the other rabbi who prayed on time?

This rabbi's response was, "How can you compare me to the other rabbi. Whenever he gets up to pray he is ready

to pray. He doesn't need any preparation. I'm different. I need hours to get ready to pray."

"As we go to sleep, so do we awaken."

Perhaps, we can apply this story to understand the dynamics of the Mincha prayer. The Morning Prayer is one that even when prayed on time, it is always one for which we are prepared. It is prayed in a time when we are refreshed and eager to take on the day. In addition, we have the evening before to prepare for our morning. As the Chassidic adage goes: "As we go to sleep, so do we awaken."

If we go to sleep after reciting the evening Shema in which we declare our affirmation for one G-d, we wake up with a feeling of reverence and love for G-d.

If we go to sleep after reciting the "confession" prayer, in which we make amends for the day's mistakes, we wake up with a clean slate; without anything to obstruct our path to G-d in our morning prayers.

If we go to sleep after reciting the special prayer in which we express forgiveness to anyone who might have slighted us during the day, we wake up unburdened by all the feelings of resentment that we might otherwise harbor and get into the way of concentrating on our prayers.

Hence, Abraham's Morning Prayer was one in which he was always prepared.

Psychological Boost

Jacob's evening prayer, though it follows our day's work, has the benefit of knowing that the day is over, and it is now time to focus on the spiritual matters.

That realization, in and of itself, serves as a psychological boost to our powers of concentration, and enhances our ability to detach ourselves from the entanglements we experience throughout our normal work day.

Mincha Mode

Mincha takes place smack in middle of the work day. We have neither the luxury of the preparation of Shacharis nor the detachment of Ma'ariv. Our minds are racing with thoughts about what has transpired and what will happen in the next few minutes. One has to be on a much higher spiritual plane to be able to be in the world and be capable of rising above it without much time to change one's mindset.

This is why Isaac was eminently qualified to institute Mincha. Isaac was designated as a sacrifice, and from that time onward he was forbidden to leave the Land of Israel

because his whole being had become a part of the Holy Land. For him there were no distractions. His attitude and mindset during the day was no different from his spiritual form in the morning or the evening. He was always ready to speak to G-d.

Messianic Age: the Age of Mincha and Isaac

One of the distinctions of the Messianic Age is that we will be prepared for our prayers at all times. Even when we will be engaged in some mundane activity, the transition to our prayers will be seamless.

This may also explain why the Talmud identifies Isaac as the Patriarch that we will embrace most energetically; more so than Abraham and Jacob.

Abraham and Jacob relate to us best when we are in our Shacharis and Ma'ariv mode. Our ability to be in a perpetual Mincha mode we will receive from Isaac.

ESSAY ELEVEN

THE SAME OLD NEW STORIES

Our unparalleled history of devotion and sacrifice is testimony to the greatness of our fathers and mothers.

Every time we perform a Mitzvah it not only attests to our own loyalty to G-d, it testifies to the devotion of our ancestors as well.

ESSAY ELEVEN

THE SAME OLD NEW STORIES

Repetition

One of the most amazing features of Biblical literature is the extent to which attention has been paid to the narratives concerning the Patriarchs and Matriarchs.

When we survey the bulk of the Five Books of Moses we discover that it contains hundreds of commandments. (There are, as is well known, 613 Biblical commandments. However, many of these commandments are repeated several times, so the total number of legal directives in the Torah may actually be in the thousands.) Yet, most of these commandments are expressed in the most succinct fashion. Frequently, the Talmud will demonstrate how multiple laws can be derived from one verse and even from one word or letter! Rarely does the Torah discuss any commandment extensively and broadly. It is up to the Oral tradition to expound on the laws as they are mentioned in the Torah.

By stark contrast, when the Torah relates the story of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, these stories are recounted in

vivid detail. And there is no place in the Torah where this phenomenon is more pronounced than in this week's Torah portion: Chayei Sarah. After Sarah's passing, Abraham sends his trusted servant Eliezer to his home country to find a wife for his son Isaac.

The Torah then proceeds to tell the story, not only with all of its particulars, but, in addition, it is repeated several times: First the Torah tells us what Eliezer did and said in order to find Rebecca. Then the Torah tells us how Rebecca reported the things Eliezer said and did. Eliezer subsequently recounts these same events to Rebecca's family. The same story, with some variation, is repeated three times! Yet, some of the most important pieces of Divine legislation are contained in or derived from one verse or less!

Rashi, citing Rabbi Acha, a Talmudic Sage explains:

> "The talk of the servants of the Patriarchs is more beautiful to G-d than the Torah of their children."

At first glance, this explanation does not really address the difficulty as to why the Torah repeats the story of Eliezer; it merely serves to highlight the question. Why, indeed, is the Torah enamored with the servants of the Patriarchs? Why is the Torah, which means "instruction," less concerned with the instructions to the Jewish people to whom the Torah was given and for whom these Mitzvos

and laws form the basis of their existence than it is with the stories of their progenitors?

Revised Translation

One answer to this question will become apparent if we allow for a slightly different translation of the foregoing aphorism: Instead of "The talk of the servants of the Patriarchs is more beautiful to G-d **than** the Torah of their children," the Hebrew wording allows for:

> "The talk of the servants of the Patriarchs is beautiful to G-d **from** the Torah of their children."

Whereas in the standard translation of Rabbi Acha's aphorism the point being made is that the Torah prefers the stories of the Patriarchs (and even their servants) **over** the Torah given to the Jewish people "the children"), in the "revised" translation, the Torah given to the children is what makes the story of the lives of the Patriarchs and their servants so beautiful and meaningful.

To explain:

When one looks at the way we ("the children") have embraced and implemented the intricate teachings of the Torah that were transmitted to us in just a few, often cryptic, words, the question is where did we get the inspiration to be so faithful to every nuance of G-d's will?

How could a people be so conscientious about what might seem as the "minutiae" of a religion that was given thousands of years ago?

The answer is, it was the devotion of our fathers and mothers and the lives that they lead. When we think back at our ancestors, going all the way back to the Patriarchs and Matriarchs, we can learn so much from their behavior. Everything they did was pregnant with feeling, sensitivity, faith reverence and love. Even their servants were so inspired and affected by their close relationship to them that their actions also expressed these wonderful traits.

In other words, our unparalleled actions are testimony to the greatness of our fathers and mothers. Every time we perform a Mitzvah it not only attests to our own loyalty to G-d, it testifies to the devotion of our ancestors as well.

Narratives Acquire New Meaning

We can take this new translation a step further. When we read the stories of the Torah we may tend to think of them as interesting, nice, exciting, even inspiring descriptions of the lives of our forebears. However, when we study the Torah teachings given to us, the "children," i.e., when these same stories are reflected through the prism of the "Torah of the Children" these narratives acquire much greater beauty and relevance.

When the Torah was given at Sinai they received more than just that which appears in the Five Books of Moses. Our Sages tell us that all of Jewish knowledge was transmitted by G-d at Sinai. In their words:

> "All the innovative teachings that will ever be introduced by any worthy student have been given to Moses at Sinai."

However, every hidden nuance that was implicit in the original communication at Sinai has its special time when it is right for it to be introduced into our consciousness through some "worthy student."

In the "Torah of the Children," we discover that every detail of the Biblical stories is replete with a multitude of levels of meaning. Each meaning conveys a timely message that was intended for us to apply to our own lives. No longer are these cute reminiscences of our past; they are instruments of Divine knowledge, no less instructive than the laws of the Torah themselves.

Hence, we can discover the beauty of the narratives of our Patriarchs by delving into the teachings of "the children." This is true especially when we study the mystical teachings of the Torah that were transmitted via the Kabbalists and the Chassidic masters that were revealed in recent past. Through this prism, the stories of our fathers become so much more meaningful and poignant.

A "New" Torah?

Concerning the Messianic Age, the prophet declares that we will see a "new Torah" come from G-d.

It is abundantly clear from numerous Biblical verses that the Torah can never change. The meaning of a "new Torah" then is that Moshiach will reveal heretofore hidden dimensions of Torah that for us and all of our predecessors will be new despite the fact that they were implicit in the communication at Sinai.

We now have a sample of that "new knowledge" in the spiritual teachings of the Chassidic Masters that were revealed and have become popularized in the last two centuries.

When Moshiach will reveal these new approaches to Torah, we will then be further exposed to the depth and beauty of the narratives of the Torah concerning our Patriarchs and Matriarchs. May we experience the unleashing of this new knowledge imminently!

ESSAY TWELVE

THE SEARCH AND DISCOVERY OF MARRIAGE

Marriage, according to the Zohar, is the reunion of two half souls which were separated at birth.

Marriage thus is discovery of another person, a total stranger up till now, who is actually your other half.

ESSAY TWELVE

THE SEARCH AND DISCOVERY OF MARRIAGE

Marriage and Prayer

The first marriage recorded in the Torah, that between the Patriarch Yitzchak and the Matriarch Rivka, takes place in this week's parsha. The Torah devotes a multitude of verses to describe the way Eliezer, Abraham's trusted servant, discovered, tested and then brought Rivka back home to wed Yitzchak.

The final stage in the saga of their marriage is described by the Torah as follows:

"And Yitzchak went out to converse in the field towards evening and he lifted his eyes and saw camels coming. Rivka lifted her eyes and saw Yitzchak... And she said to the servant, 'who is this man...' And the servant told Yitzchak all of the things he did. Yitzchak then brought her to the tent of Sarah his mother, and he took Rivka and she became his wife, and he loved her..."

Ba'al Haturim makes an astute observation. The marriage of Yitzchak and Rivka is juxtaposed with Yitzchak going out

into the field to "converse," which our Sages stated was when Yitzchak instituted the Mincha-Afternoon prayer. Ba'al Haturim derives from this juxtaposition that: "Yitzchak instituted the Mincha prayer just as Rivka appeared." This is consistent with the verse in Psalms (32:6): "For this let every pious man pray to You at the time that You are found." This [the Talmud states] alludes to a wife, as it is written: "He who has found a wife has found good." (Proverbs 18:22)

Ba'al Haturims's thesis is that there is a special relationship between prayer and finding one's mate.

This raises two questions:

First, why is marriage any more connected to prayer than all the other needs we have and must depend on G-d for their provision? Don't we pray for health, sustenance and Redemption among other vital needs we have?

Second, why does the Torah make the connection between prayer and marriage specifically in the context of the Mincha prayer?

Finding Your Other Half

To answer these questions it is first necessary to understand why locating a marriage partner is characterized as a "find" or "discovery."

One answer is that marriage, according to the Zohar, is the reunion of two half souls which were separated at birth. Marriage thus is discovery of another person, a total stranger up till now, who is actually your other half.

Moreover, the Talmud (Kiddushin 2b), describes the process of looking for one's mate as looking for a part of one's self that was "lost." To create Eve, G-d had to separate a part of Adam from himself. When G-d performed the first marriage, of Adam to Eve, it was a process of reuniting the two physical halves of their bodies that had been separated. The separation and reunification of Adam and Eve is the paradigm for all future marriages. Indeed, in the blessings recited at weddings today we refer to the joy that G-d brought to Adam and Eve when they were married in the Garden of Eden and we ask G-d to bring that same joy to the bride and the groom. Thus, the physical act of bringing Adam and Eve together parallels the spiritual reuniting of two halves of one soul that takes place in every marriage.

When we marry, ideally it is to our newly rediscovered long lost other half.

Glitch

There can however be a glitch in the process of marriage. Since we are physical beings who have little or no

understanding of our soul's nature and needs, we can end up choosing a mate who is not our other half. Physical attraction, financial status and other superficial considerations can fool two people into thinking that they are compatible. Usually, these marriages do not survive. In truth, they are between two very different people with different spiritual potentials and who are not fundamentally compatible. The incompatibility factor is even more pronounced when the relationship is one proscribed by the Torah. The couple who enter into this relationship are not just incompatible; their union is utterly destructive for both of their souls. Frequently, their souls' spiritual frustration and devastation manifest themselves in the physical realm too and ensure that the marriage will end in acrimony and tragedy for all involved, including their children.

Marriage: A Double Edged Sword

In light of the above understanding of marriage we see how it is radically different from all other benefits. On the one hand, one can make a powerful argument for the pre-eminent state marriage has over all the other benefits we enjoy in life. Marriage provides people with a litany of benefits including companionship, security and financial stability, an outlet for love and intimacy and many more.

Many people would prefer a healthy, loving and enduring marriage over great wealth and even good health. Proof of this assertion is the countless number of people who have stayed married despite suffering deprivation and hardship, even though they could have left the marriage for greener pastures. The love and soul connections that bind them together are inseparable.

On the other hand, a wretched marriage can be one of the most destructive forces in society. Many instances of domestic abuse are reported today. Marriage is no guarantee against abuse; bad marriages actually foster it. It is a pathetic truth that people in a relationship are far more likely to be victims of their spouse than being victimized by a total stranger.

The primary source for this contradiction lies in the status of their souls. If our souls are compatible and marriage is the discovery of our other half, then the marriage's likelihood of survival and flourishing is enhanced. To be sure, there are no assurances that even these marriages will be ideal. In very important respects, marriage works better as a verb than as a noun. We must work to make our inner spiritual bond express itself on all levels of our personalities. But, when two are actually one at their core and their marriage the discovery of this union, is far more likely that the marriage will be a good one favored with G-d's infinite blessings.

We can now appreciate that marriage is fundamentally different from all other physical and spiritual benefits. Health, wealth and freedom are inherently positive things. Even so, one can distort these gifts and use them for evil. But, in and of themselves, they are blessings for which we all pray and wish.

Marriage, by contrast, is not an inherently positive experience. What appears to be a marriage might actually be a recipe for disaster because from the outset and at the most fundamental level it was not really a marriage. Their two souls were not two halves of the same whole; they were fundamentally incompatible people.

We can now understand the link between prayer and marriage that goes beyond the need for prayer for all other benefits. While the prayer for health is just that, the prayer for marriage is that it should be a real marriage; it should be the discovery of our other half rather than a superficially connected marriage.

The question remains, though, why specifically the Mincha prayer? What advantage does it enjoy over all other prayers in conjunction with marriage?

The Link between the Mincha Prayer and Marriage

Yitzchak instituted Mincha. His primary physical involvement was digging wells. This exercise is understood in Chassidic literature as parallel to his spiritual quest to remove the external layers of our personalities to discover the inner, pure waters of our soul. Yitzchak's prayer thus was logically an extension of his life's passion of discovery, which is the same as what a true marriage is all about.

Yitzchak goes out into the field—a metaphor for the most external aspects of life—to converse with G-d as a way to discover the divine within nature. Perhaps this is why Yitzchak had a special love for Esau, the man of the field. Yitzchak was a man who looked for hidden G-dliness. Similarly, a marriage is the pursuit of the hidden soul relationship between husband and wife.

The Mincha prayer differs fundamentally from the Shacharis-morning and Arvis (Ma'ariv)-evening prayers because it occurs in the middle of the work day. The morning and evening prayers are recited either before or after our engagement with the "field", the outside world. Mincha is the prayer that is most consistent with the discovery of the hidden core of G-dliness in the world. And it is the prayer most identified with discovery and marriage.

Discovering Moshiach

The revelation of Moshiach is likewise referred to as a discovery. The Psalmist (89:21) states: "I have found David my servant…" Moshiach the scion of David must be discovered. This statement implies that he is always with us, we must just recognize his presence.

The Talmud refers to the entire process of Redemption as a surprising discovery like that experienced by one who has discovered an abandoned treasure. The implication here is that no matter how much we pray for and anticipate the final Redemption, we cannot possibly fathom how glorious it will really be. In a way, this is similar to a true marriage. No matter how much love there is in the beginning of the relationship, one discovers previously unknown treasures in a spouse.

The connection of Moshiach and Redemption with marriage is even more pronounced. In exile we have lost much of our spiritual finesse. Exile conditions have strained our marriage with G-d. However, despite all of the division and strife that exile has caused between us and G-d, we know that it is only on the surface. Fundamentally, our connection is as solid as ever. All we have to do is discover the reality of our relationship with G-d.

Moreover, the Rebbe declared that the Redemption is already in front of us. The table is set with the feast of

Redemption. All we have to do is discover it by opening our eyes to this reality.

ESSAY THIRTEEN

CHAIN REACTION 1

The Torah's seemingly prosaic term "And he said" was part of the most important chain of events.

It linked the beginning of civilization to its end; the highest and most sublime spiritual energies with the lowest physical entities.

It united opposite ends of the spectrum that will finally link the beginning of history, when G-d's plan was first enunciated, with the end of history when it will be fully realized.

ESSAY THIRTEEN

CHAIN REACTION 1

Tonto in the Torah

In American culture, Tonto was the American Indian side-kick of the Lone Ranger. In Torah literature, "ToNTO" is an acronym, for the four characteristics inherent in Biblical words. The letter "tet" stands for "ta'amim-musical notes, or "trop" as they are known in Yiddish. The letter "nun" stands for "nekudot" or vowels. The letter "tav" stands for "tagin-crowns" that adorn the letters and the letters themselves, which are represented by the letter "aleph": "otiyot."

Most of Torah interpretation revolves around the letters and vowels of its words. However, every now and then we come across interpretations of the words that are based on the musical notes that are attached to each word or phrase.

Shalsheles

This approach of interpreting the notes is more apparent when a musical note appears rarely in the Torah. One of the rarest notes in the Torah is the triple- zig-zag one called "*shalsheles*." Literally the word means a chain and its shape and its sound are a long chain of winding notes, going up the musical scale. This note appears only four times in the Torah; one of these is in this week's parsha in the narrative regarding the marriage of Isaac to Rebecca; the very first marriage described in the Torah. Here is some background.

Eliezer, the servant of Abraham, was sent by his master to find a wife for his son Isaac from his homeland. Eliezer travels to Aram Naharayim, Abraham's birthplace, with camels laden with the wealth of his master.

Eliezer arrives in the evening at the outskirts of the city where the well was situated, at the time they would draw water for the camels. Eliezer turns his attention to G-d and says (Vayomar):

> "O G-d! The G-d of my master Abraham. Please let something happen to me today, and do kindness to my master, Abraham."

This prayer set into motion a flurry of events, where Rebecca's kindness was tested and clearly demonstrated,

and where, in the end, her father and reluctant brother finally let her go to marry Isaac.

Now, the word "Vayomar-And he said," that prefaces his prayer, is one of the four places in the Torah that are sung to the tune of the winding shalsheles note. And here the question can be asked: If the shalsheles note is so significant, why would it be attached to a word so prosaic such as: "And he said?"

Judaism's Seminal Event

Upon deeper reflection it is clear that the events that were to unfold were some of Jewish history's most important seminal events. Isaac's marriage to Rebecca was the first Jewish marriage (inasmuch as all previous marriages occurred before Abraham's covenant with G-d through circumcision). It is also the first marriage described in vivid detail in the Torah.

In Chassidic and Kabbalistic literature, this union is seen as the paradigm for all future marriages, as well as for the ultimate marriage between G-d and Israel that began at Sinai and will be completed in the Messianic Era. Kabbalah teaches us that the spiritual dynamics for these future unions, individual, national and cosmic were all set into motion at the marriage between Isaac and Rebecca.

When Eliezer opened his mouth "And he said," he tapped into a divinely orchestrated Master Plan that would soon unfold and span the expanse of history.

His words (that whichever girl would show kindness by providing water not just for him but also for his camels) ultimately proved to be prescient and provided the sign that Rebecca was indeed the chosen for Isaac. He now tapped into a dynamic that encompassed all of what Kabbalah calls "*seder hishtalshelus*," which can be loosely translated as the "entire order of existence from the highest primordial realms to the lowest forms of physical existence." The term "hishtalshelus" is related to the musical note, the "shalsheles," which translates literally as a chain. A chain is a series of interlocked links that can extend from one distant place to another, and it serves as a metaphor for the entire range of existence.

The Torah's seemingly prosaic term "And he said" was part of the most important chain of events. It linked the beginning of civilization to its end; the highest and most sublime spiritual energies with the lowest physical entities. It united opposite ends of the spectrum, which will finally link the beginning of history, when G-d's plan was first enunciated, with the end of history when it will be fully realized.

An Atypical Prayer

Moreover, according to the Midrash, Eliezer's prayer was one of the most unique prayers in history. Even before he finished his prayer, G-d had already answered him and sent Rebecca, whom he had chosen as Isaac's wife. The Rebbe (See Gutnick Chumash p. 151) demonstrates how G-d had already orchestrated events before Eliezer even began praying. Rebecca's arrival could not have been a response to Eliezer's prayer, since she had left her home to come to the well before Eliezer began praying.

Hence, a straightforward reading of the words "And he said" indicates that his saying was not a typical prayer. In the normal sequence of events prayer precedes the response to the prayer. Here the order was reversed. First G-d sets into motion a process that will lead to Rebecca coming to the well, where she exhibits incredible kindness, thereby passing the test of eligibility for marriage to Isaac.

Based on this premise we can add further explanation why the winding, and seemingly endless note is used to describe the opening of Eliezer's monologue/prayer.

What seems to be a simple prayer, turns out to be nothing less than one small, but, as stated earlier, significant, detail in a Divine orchestration of events that led to the discovery of Rebecca, who becomes the Matriarch of the Jewish people, and whose role then effected all of Jewish and

world history, including our very existence today and that will lead, inexorably to the coming of Moshiach.

Prosaic or Poetic?

The question as to why a seemingly prosaic word/phrase as "Vayomar-And he said" would be punctuated with one of the rarest, longest, most complex and winding sound and notes is now fully answered, carrying with it a powerful message for all times, particularly ours.

There are times when we say or do simple and inconsequential things and they set into motion major events. They can be a link in the chain that can affect the entire order of "hishtalshelus," all of existence. Lighting one match in a forest can lead to catastrophic results far beyond the power of one little, but hardly unimportant, act of striking the match.

There are also other times when we say or do things that are rather insignificant, and they, in and of themselves, have little impact, but they are the pieces that fit into an elaborate puzzle that was orchestrated by G-d, without which that puzzle will not be complete.

When Eliezer opened his mouth to speak, he felt that he had become G-d's instrument to bring about this historic union of Isaac and Rebecca; s union that would have many

twists and turns (similar to the "shalsheles" note that zig-zags). He sensed that he was part of a cosmic exercise, and that is what gave him the confidence that he would succeed. He would not take no from Rebecca's family as an answer. He was determined to see this through.

We are similarly called upon to do what we think seems undistinguished. We should never underestimate the power of our actions and words. We can be playing a part in the ultimate drama of history in finishing that which Eliezer started: The bringing together of the pieces that are needed to make the world a world of peace between G-d and us, as well as peace between all of existence.

Before we consider saying something or doing something that might seem unimportant, think about the shalsheles note above the words ("And he said"): If what we say or do is positive we can become an integral link in the chain that leads from G-d's first generation of energy to bring about existence to the last link that is a perfected physical world; the world of the Messianic Age, when G-d's presence will be fully manifested in our lives and throughout the universe.

ESSAY FOURTEEN
A CHAIN REACTION II

ESSAY FOURTEEN

A CHAIN REACTION II

The Unusual Musical Note

In this week's parsha, Eliezer, the servant of the Patriarch Abraham, is sent on a mission to Charan to find a suitable wife for his master's son, Isaac. When he arrives in Charan, he prays to G-d that he should find the one destined for his Isaac. In the end, soon after concluding his prayer, he finds Rebecca who consents to become Isaac's wife. This incident, arguably, is the fastest response to a prayer on record!

The prayer which is introduced with the word *Vayomer*, which means "And he said." While there is nothing unusual with that introductory word, there is something quite unusual about the musical note (*trop*) that is connected to this word, which tells us how to chant that word when we read the Torah publicly *Shabbos* morning.

The *Shalsheles* note appears only four times throughout the entire Five Books of Moses, so it is strange that a prosaic word like "And he said," should have a note so

unique. There must be a deep message contained in this note and its appearance here.

The *Shalsheles* note resembles and sounds like its translation, a chain of three. When one chants the Torah, this note sounds like a chain of three notes, each taking the one who chants to a higher level.

There are two, interlinking (pun intended) ways of explaining this rare note and its appearance here in the narrative of Eliezer finding a wife for Isaac:

Eliezer's prayer to G-d was about finding a match for Isaac. Ostensibly, it is about two individuals who would be brought together in marriage. This might be a touching seen, but by adding the *Shalsheles* note here, the Torah wishes to inform us that the events that will follow are infinitely more significant.

The Linchpin

This match—the first to be mentioned in the Torah—was the linchpin that would link Abraham to Jacob—the three Patriarchs—thereby creating a powerful chain reaction that would last for all eternity. Had this marriage not worked out, Abraham's contribution and legacy would have been aborted or fizzled out little by little. The *Shalsheles* note, thus, alludes to the power of the three links—

Abraham, Isaac and Jacob—that helped to forge a Jewish nation.

Link to the Future

Secondly, when Eliezer prays to G-d to find a suitable match for Isaac he recognizes that this event was not just about the marriage of two important people. The very insightful, devoted and even prescient servant of Abraham sees the future in this marriage. He sees an entire chain of generations that will bring light and inspiration to the entire world that will lead inexorably to the final Redemption through Moshiach.

He is about to introduce a new family to the world that will lead to a chain of events that will impact all of human history in ways that are unparalleled.

Indeed, Judaism is all about interlocking links that connects our past to us and us to our past. Judaism is all about the links of tradition, that facilitated the transmission of the teachings of the Torah—particularly the Oral Torah—from one generation to the next. The same spiritual, ethical, moral and legal teachings that our ancestors lived and died for, are in our hands today thanks to the fact that there is a *Shalsheles* that has never been broken.

Finding the Lost Souls

In truth, there are many individuals whose ties to the past have been weakened considerably, or completely severed. These are the lost Jews who have forgotten that they are part of this chain. For the first time in history, perhaps, we have Jews who have so strayed from their own past that they know nothing about what it means to be a Jew. Some even have rebelled against Judaism and the Jewish people. But even worse than those, who some have branded "self-hating" Jews, are the indifferent Jews; those who care not to even rebel, argue and debate. The rebels among us are struggling with their identities; a sure sign that all is not lost. The energy with which they resist Judaism can then be channeled into a positive identification with Judaism.

It is the indifferent Jew that lacks even a trace of energy and interest when it comes to Jewish matters. The *Shalsheles* note does not resonate with them; its sounds are totally muffled.

It is concerning these "lost" souls that the last prophet Malachi predicts that during the Messianic Age, Elijah the prophet will come and "restore the hearts of the parents to the children and the hearts of the children to the parents." This prophecy made about 2,400 years ago was that the chain will be made whole again.

Indeed, according to Rashi, the first part of that verse makes an even greater claim: "He will restore the hearts of the parents **through** the children…" It is the young generation that will arise and recognize that they have a link to somewhere, someone, something, and will search and not rest until they find its matching link. This prophecy has materialized before our very eyes. Tens of thousands of young people have, in the last few decades, rediscovered their Jewish roots, and have restored the *Shalsheles*/chain to its original position.

Our task is to listen to the voices of the youth—literally and the spirit of youth embedded in our souls—and help them help us reconnect to the *Shalsheles;* which, in its completed state, will link Abraham, Isaac, Jacob to Moses and Mount Sinai, and Moses to/through our generation to Moshiach.

ESSAY FIFTEEN

THE VEIL

To ensure that the *Shabbos* is hermetically sealed off from the rest of the week, the woman who lights the *Shabbos* candles hides behind a veil of sorts.

This, in turn, preserves the peaceful aura of *Shabbos*.

Since peace is the greatest receptacle for all of G-d's blessings, the veil is appropriately the medium for the blessing of a good living.

ESSAY FIFTEEN

THE VEIL

A Sign of Modesty

It is almost a universal custom for a bride to wear a veil. The source of this practice appears to derive from the narrative of Rebecca in this week's parsha.

Eliezer, Abraham's servant, has returned from Abraham's birthplace with Rebecca, to be Isaac's bride. When they reach their destination and she notices a man walking in their direction, she asks Eliezer, "Who is that man?" Eliezer's reply, that it was his master Isaac, prompts an immediate reaction from Rebecca: "She took a veil and covered herself."

On the surface, the reason for covering her face with a veil was a sign of modesty. But there is also a deeper reason that may be suggested.

Keeping Out Distractions

When we recite the Shema we also cover our eyes. When a woman lights the *Shabbos* candles, it is customary for her to cover her face. There is a common thread that runs through these three examples of covering of the face.

One reason for the covering of the face during the recitation of the Shema is to keep out all distractions, so that we can focus on the message of G-d's unity.

Acknowledging Exclusivity

Yet, on a deeper level, the covering of the face—that blocks out everything else—is actually our way of expressing through our actions that there is indeed no other influence in our lives; G-d is absolutely one.

Similarly, when a woman lights the *Shabbos* candles and ushers in the holy radiance of *Shabbos*, she covers her face as a way of blocking out any trace of darkness that might have been left over from the travail of the past week.

When a man marries a woman, she covers her face as her way of blocking out any other loyalties and connections she might have. Her loyalty to her husband is absolute.

Channel for G-d's Blessings

There is a tradition that the Hebrew word for veil-*tza'if* is an acronym for four Hebrew words that translate as "Your nation Israel needs sustenance."

The import of this seemingly farfetched reference is that when a woman covers her face at her wedding ceremony, and then when she lights the *Shabbos* candles each and every week, it is the spiritual mechanism to channel G-d's blessings for sustenance.

The Spirit of Peace

The rationale for this is that G-d's blessings of sustenance in a home—along with all of the other blessings we want—depend on the spirit of peace and tranquility that pervades the home. Lighting of the *Shabbos* candles is one medium that creates an atmosphere of peace and serenity. But when is the spirit of peace at its peak?

The answer is when all of the weekday influences exit the home at the onset of the *Shabbos*. Weekday activities that involve ambition and competition often invite strife and discord in a community and family.

Shabbos is the greatest antidote to that strife when we desist from all of our weekday activities. We do not answer the phone, drive the car or discuss business. We do not

allow the television to smuggle in the strife ridden outside atmosphere into our homes on the one day of rest. During *Shabbos* we are no longer a slave to technology or even to our pursuit of a living. And when we experience one day of unadulterated peace and fulfillment it also has an effect on the forthcoming week. It provides the otherwise stressful week with a measure of the *Shabbos* serenity.

To ensure that the *Shabbos* is hermetically sealed off from the rest of the week, the woman who lights the *Shabbos* candles hides behind a veil of sorts. This, in turn, preserves the peaceful aura of *Shabbos*. And since peace is the greatest receptacle for all of G-d's blessings, the veil is appropriately the medium for the blessing of a good living.

Lighting the Lights of the Future Shabbos

In a historical context we are presently ready to light the candles to usher in the ultimate Sabbath of Redemption. All of our efforts must be directed to once and for all leave the painful exile that we have endured for thousands of years.

As we light the candles of Redemption by illuminating our souls with the light and warmth of Judaism, it behooves us to cover our faces with the veil that blocks out the exile mentality that is punctuated with discord and division. We

must use all of our energy to focus entirely on the internalization of the *Shabbos*.

After all these years we have done everything that we needed to do to usher in the Messianic Age. Now is the time to greet the Sabbath of history by blocking out the past exile mentality, and then by opening our eyes to behold the beautiful and holy light of the ultimate *Shabbos* that will lead the entire world to everlasting peace and fulfillment.

ESSAY SIXTEEN

TORAH: THE LINK TO THE PAST AND FUTURE

When we appreciate the stories of the Torah, particularly the miracles of the Patriarchs that are highlighted in the narrative of Eliezer the servant of Abraham, it prepares us for the miracles of the future.

When we study Torah by searching for new ideas and continually seeing its intricacies and new shades of meaning, we will be prepared for the time when we will see the ultimate novel dimensions of Torah that will be revealed to all of us exclusively by G-d through Moshiach.

The Torah we learn now links us to the future just as it connects us to our past.

ESSAY SIXTEEN

TORAH: THE LINK TO THE PAST AND FUTURE

[A second version of Essay Eleven]

"The conversations of the servants of the Patriarchs is more pleasing before G-d than the Torah of the children"

The Torah is known for its brevity. Many of the laws of the Torah are mentioned ever so succinctly. Others are merely hinted in the Torah. Often one word, or even letter of the Torah, can be the basis for the derivation of a Torah law. In short, the Torah is extremely economical when it comes to the use of language.

Yet, this week's parsha is a glaring exception to this rule. In this parsha we read of how Abraham asks his servant Eliezer to travel to his homeland to find a suitable wife for his son Isaac. The Torah relates, in vivid detail, how Eliezer prayed to G-d and stipulated that the first girl whom he will ask for water and who will offer to bring water to his camels as well is the one that he will select for Isaac's bride. And, indeed, this is exactly what happened. The

Torah recounts in detail how he gave Rebecca jewelry after she offered to supply water for his camels. The Torah then describes how Eliezer repeats the entire story to Rebecca's father and brother and how they finally consented to the marriage. All of this is reported in vivid detail with many points repeated two or three times. This is quite uncharacteristic for the same Torah that insists on brevity even in the most important areas of law.

Rashi, cites the Talmudic sage, Rav Acha who anticipated this question and answered with a startling statement: "The conversations of the servants of the Patriarchs is more pleasing before G-d than the Torah of the children, for the narrative of the of Eliezer is doubled in the Torah while many essential elements of the Torah were given only by allusion."

This statement at face value is difficult to understand. How could a "mere" story be more important than the laws of the Torah? Moreover, the Torah is divided into the Written Law and the Oral Law. Despite the fact that many of the laws are merely hinted in the Torah, they are expounded upon at great length in the Oral Torah (much of which was subsequently committed to writing in the Talmud and Midrash). Why was the Written Torah chosen to detail the stories of the Patriarchs (and their servants) while the intricacies of the laws of the Torah are reserved for the Oral Law?

"Than" and "From?"

One novel way of understanding Rav Acha's statement is to use an alternate translation of his words. In Hebrew the letter *mem* is a prefix that can be translated either as "than" implying that the former (the conversations of the servants of the Patriarchs) or as "from," thus yielding the following rendition: "[That] the conversations of the servants of the Patriarchs is pleasing before G-d is **derived from** the Torah of the children." The Torah of the children inform us of the greatness of the conversation of the servants of the fathers.

In other words, we can only fully appreciate the value of the conversations of the servants of the Patriarchs because we have access to the Torah given to the children.

According to this novel way of understanding Rav Acha's message, there is no suggestion that the laws are of minor significance. Rather, it is to suggest that when we examine the incredible wealth of knowledge that is implicit in even one small letter of the Torah we will begin to appreciate the importance of the stories of the Torah as well. We will then not view these stories as mere historical accounts or interesting anecdotes but as eternal messages.

If even one letter of the Torah can form the basis of an elaborate edifice of laws, it tells us that every letter of the Torah contains unfathomable depth. There is no limit to

the number of ideas and applications that can be derived from the slightest nuance of the Written Torah. We can then infer that all of the Torah, including the casual conversation of the servants of the Patriarchs, contains profound and timeless messages.

The reason why the details of the commandments are not fleshed out in the Torah is to underscore the infinite value of Torah. The deeper something is the more we have to resort to hints and allusions to convey their transcendent nature. By giving us only sketchy and cryptic information to convey intricate teachings we are exposed to the true G-dly nature of Torah. When we realize its true nature it instills within us great respect and reverence for the Torah.

The Talmud relates that when Rabbi Akiva died the "honor of Torah" ceased. Rashi explains that Rabbi Akiva was known for his ability to demonstrate the significance of even the slightest nuance of the Torah. Even the "crowns" above the letters, and certainly the words and letters themselves, he was able to interpret. No detail is superfluous and nothing in Torah is devoid of meaning.

Moreover, the fact that there is so much hidden in even one letter of Torah is an indication that the narratives of the Patriarchs and their servants contains within it even deeper mysteries as well as down to earth instructions.

The Torah and the Children

We can take this a step further. Not only do the **laws** of the Torah given to the "children" provide us with insight into the depth of the Torah inherent in the conversations of the servants of the Patriarchs, it goes beyond that.

The emphasis should not just be on the Torah, it should also be on the children, for Rav Acha did not just mention the Torah; he specifically referred to the Torah as "the Torah of the children." Perhaps his intention was to highlight the degree to which the Jewish people ("children") have realized the significance of every minute detail of Torah and were prepared to sacrifice life and limb for their observance. Just as the intricacies of Torah inform us of the deeper meaning in the conversations of the servants of the Patriarchs, so too, the dedication of the children to what might seem the minutiae of Torah tells us something about our origins. It directs us to search for the root of this phenomenon. Children like this do not grow in a vacuum.

Look to the Rock

Thus, when we look at the Jewish people and their dedication to Torah it informs us of our Patriarchs, Matriarchs and even their servants.

Indeed, the prophet Isaiah (51:2) states: "Look unto the rock from which you were hewn, and to the hole of the pit from which you were dug. Look unto Abraham your father and unto Sarah that bore you. For when he was but one I called him, and I blessed him and made him many."

By reflecting on the intricacies of Torah we get a glimpse into the lives of our Patriarchs.

A New Torah

When we examine the foregoing citation from Isaiah it is noteworthy that shortly after pointing us to the past, exhorting us to "look unto Abraham", it changes direction to talk about the future Messianic Age at which time "Torah shall go forth from Me." According to the Midrash this refers to the novel teachings of Torah that will be revealed by Moshiach in the Messianic Age, in relation to which, our Sages tell us, the Torah we are in possession of now is "*hevel*-vanity."

What, we may ask, is the connection between looking to our past and the new dimension of Torah that we will be taught by Moshiach in the future?

When the reverence for our Torah reflects the superior and more exquisite beauty of our Patriarchs, we thereby prepare ourselves for the Torah study of the future. The

Torah we study today is the precursor to the Torah of the future.

When we appreciate the stories of the Torah—and particularly the miracles of the Patriarchs that are highlighted in the narrative of Eliezer the servant of Abraham—it prepares us for the miracles of the future.

When we study Torah by searching for new ideas and continually seeing its intricacies and new shades of meaning, we will be prepared for the time when we will see the ultimate novel dimensions of Torah that will be revealed to all of us exclusively by G-d through Moshiach.

The Torah we learn now links us to the future just as it connects us to our past.

ESSAY SEVENTEEN

OPPORTUNISM

When you see someone who is filled with a passion for something, instead of knocking it and trying to suppress it, be an opportunist and use that love for something positive.

ESSAY SEVENTEEN

OPPORTUNISM

Loving Friends?

Upon Sarah's passing, Abraham approaches Efron, the leader of the Hittites, to purchase the Cave of Machpelah, a burial plot for his wife. At first, the Hittites, and then their leader Efron, wanted to give it to Abraham gratis. When Abraham insisted that he pay for it, Efron finally "relented" and said,

> "My lord, listen to me; a piece of land worth four hundred shekels of silver, what is that between me and you?"

What exactly did Efron mean when he said, "what is that between me and you?" Rashi explains: "Between **two loving friends as we are**, what is its value?

What did Efron mean when he said that they were loving friends? After all, Abraham had just met Efron a few minutes earlier. How could Efron think that his transparent flattery would get him anywhere?

Obviously Efron and Abraham were as far apart as any two

individuals can possibly be. In fact, they were diametrically opposites. One glaring example of their opposing mindsets is the fact that "Abraham would promise little but deliver a lot." This occurred in last week's parsha, where Abraham offers his guests just bread, but actually serves them a lavish meal with meat and other delicacies.

Efron, in stark contrast, is magnanimous in his offer to Abraham. "Have it all for nothing," he said initially, but in the end, he demanded an exorbitant amount for the burial plot—four hundred silver coins.

Was there really anything they had in common?

Shared Passion

The answer is yes, they both had a strong passion for that which was important to them. Abraham valued the land of Israel, while Efron valued and loved money.

Efron therefore said to Abraham, "between two 'lovers' - you who 'love' the land, and I who 'love' money - 400 shekels of silver is a minimal amount." Their common ground was love. And when the two loves—for diametrically opposite ideals—met, they both took advantage of it.

All of Life is an Exercise in Opportunism

Sounds opportunistic? It certainly was, but upon deeper reflection all of life is a pursuit of opportunism.

When we tell a child to do something we let the child know that a reward is forthcoming if he or she complies with its parent's wish. When we get older, we discover that nothing has fundamentally changed. There will always be things we do right and things we avoid doing wrong that are motivated by the pursuit of some selfish benefit or the avoidance of a selfish loss.

Some may say, don't ever do something right for the wrong reason. Wait until you are really ready and willing to do the good for its own sake. The Torah tells us otherwise.

> "One should always study Torah or perform a Mitzvah, even for an ulterior motive, for this will eventually lead to doing it for pure motives."

If the selfish aspect of our nature is not permitted to do the right things, that selfishness will manifest itself in some other—perhaps, even destructive—area. When you see someone who is filled with a passion for something, instead of knocking it and trying to suppress it, be an opportunist and use that love for something positive.

This story, besides its literal meaning, conveys a profound

lesson in the way we have to do business with our competing impulses.

There is a part of us that has a love of money and other material goods. Another part of us has a passion for the spiritual. On the surface it seems that there is a irreconcilable gap between the two parts of our personality.

The story of the two loves of Abraham and Efron, indicates how we need not negate either. We can utilize the passion we have for the material as a way of indulging our passion for the spiritual.

Moshiach: The Fusion of the Two Loves

Maimonides, when discussing the ultimate age of Redemption, speaks of how great life will be then in spiritual terms. But, in addition to the spiritually sublime nature of life then, Maimonides describes the Messianic Age as a time when all the physical delights will proliferate.

Why, commentators ask, did Maimonides have to add the part about the material blessings?

The answer given is that we must be motivated to work for the coming of Moshiach. It is not a passive thing where we sit back and just let someone else do the work for us—whether that "someone" is G-d or the Moshiach. The task

of changing the world for the good—permanently—is a task given to each and every one of us.

But there are those who may not be motivated to do that because they are content with the life they have now and have now appreciation for the spiritual blessings of the future.

To these individuals—and to all of us who may possess just a tinge of this attitude—Maimonides states that even our material lives will be better. Even the most selfish and pleasure seeking part of our personality can motivate us to work on bringing Moshiach closer.

Moshiach is a unifier. And just as he will bring different nations together, Moshiach will also make it possible for the two loves of Efron and Abraham to work together as one.

ESSAY EIGHTEEN

SPEAK LITTLE AND FINISH THE JOB

We are now standing on the cusp of the Final Redemption.

It behoove us to remember that what is most important now is finishing the task and bringing G-d's Master Plan to its conclusion.

ESSAY EIGHTEEN

SPEAK LITTLE AND FINISH THE JOB

The Discrepancy

Eliezer, Abraham's servant, was sent by his master to find a suitable wife for his master's son, Isaac.

When he arrives at his destination he offers the following prayer to G-d:

> "...Please let something happen to me today and do kindness to my master, Abraham. Look, I am standing by the water well. The daughters of this city's residents are coming out to draw water. If I say to a girl, 'Please tilt down your pitcher and let me drink,' and she says, 'Drink, and I will also give your camels to drink.' (she will be fit to) be chosen by You for Your servant, for Isaac. I will know that through her You have acted kindly with my master."

The Torah continues:

> "He had not finished speaking, and—behold! Rebecca... came out, and her pitcher was on her shoulder... She went down to the well, filled her

> pitcher and came back up. The servant ran toward her, and said, "Please let me sip a little water from your pitcher." She said, "Drink, sir."

She quickly took down her pitcher into her hand, and gave him to drink. When she finished giving him a drink, she said,

> "I will also draw (water) for your camels, until they have finished drinking."

She quickly emptied her pitcher into the trough, and ran to the well again to draw water. She drew (water) for all his camels.

What is noteworthy about this story is the discrepancy between Eliezer's words and Rebecca's actions. Rebecca's actions did not match Eliezer's test. Eliezer said, "If... she says, 'Drink, and I will also give your camels to drink,' whereas she just gave him water to drink without mentioning his camels. Only after he finished drinking did she offer to draw water for the camels.

Moreover, when Eliezer recounts his experience with Rebecca to her family he varies the sequence. He simply states: "... she quickly lowered her pitcher from (shoulder), and said, ''Drink, and I will give your camels to drink too."

Why did he not tell them the truth, that she did not offer water for the camels until after Eliezer finished drinking?

Changing the Sequence of Events

Another question raised by many of the commentators concerns Eliezer's reaction to Rebecca's behavior. Immediately after she gives water for the camels he adorns her with jewelry before he even asks her who she is. Why was he so certain that she was the one destined for Isaac before making sure she was from Abraham's family, one of the conditions Abraham stipulated to Eliezer?

Moreover, when he recounts this episode to Rebecca's family he reverses the order of events to forestall their obvious question, why he would give her jewelry before knowing who she was.

Rashi addresses this question and states that Eliezer was confident that he would be successful due to Abraham's merit. However, the fact that he felt he had to test Rebecca's kindness indicates that he didn't just rely on Abraham's merit, for if that were the case he could randomly select the first girl that he met.

Commentators explain that the test was to determine if Rebecca possessed the trait of kindness. It was a test she passed with flying colors. However, this explanation falls short in light of the discrepancy between what Eliezer proposed as his test and how she acted.

Beyond Expectations and Conventions

In truth, we might suggest, it was not just the kindness that she exhibited but it was, in fact, the way she went beyond Eliezer's expectations of her kindness and exhibited another one of the unique traits of Abraham we encountered in last week's parsha. This added dimension of her behavior proved to Eliezer, without a doubt, that she must be of Abraham's family stock. A display of mere kindness by her would still have required that Eliezar ascertain her identity before rewarding her with jewelry.

What was the "extra" ingredient in Abraham's kindness that she seemed to emulate?

While Abraham was recovering from his circumcision he sat outside his tent to look for travelers whom he could invite into his tent and provide them with their needs. When they finally came, Abraham offered them just bread. In the end, he actually provided them with a gourmet meal! The Talmud (*Bava Metzia* 87a) comments on this and states:

> "From this we can derive that righteous people say little and do much more."

This, the Talmud states, is in stark contrast to the wicked who say a lot and do not even do a little. The Talmud derives this thought from the section of this week's parsha which recounts Abraham's purchase of the Cave of

Machpelah for Sarah's burial. Ephron, the Hittite leader, was initially so gracious and declined payment from Abraham. In the end, he changed his tune and demanded an exorbitant amount for the burial plot.

Here too, Rebecca was merely asked to offer a bit of water for Eliezer and for his camels. Rebecca goes way beyond that request to "sip" some water and patiently waits for Eliezer to drink his fill. She then returns and draws water for all his camels and waits for them to finish drinking.

Eliezer realized that she was not just an exceptionally kind person but that she was a perfect match for Abraham's family because she possessed the same extraordinary trait as Abraham. It was not just the kindness that made her a perfect match for Abraham's family; it was her modest offer ["say little"] that was followed by incredible effort, dedication and patience.

This explains why Eliezer did not choose to report this to Rebecca's family; they were on a completely different wave length. They could never have comprehended that extraordinary trait. Eliezer had to restrict his description of Rebecca to more conventional terms of kindness.

Why Say Little and do Much More?

At this point one might ask what is so remarkable about saying little and doing much more? Why is this considered one of the distinguishing factors between the righteous and the wicked, which resulted in her marriage to Isaac and their genesis of the Jewish people?

When a person makes grandiose offers the person usually feels positive about his or her good intentions. Every person wants to feel that he or she is a good person. In truth, kindness is not restricted to holy people. We all possess in the reservoir of our souls the Divine trait of *chesed*-kindness. This innate feeling is what makes a person, even one far removed from a virtuous life, feel the need to do something for others. However, when our egocentric nature is dominant it looks for ways to express kindness sufficient enough to assuage any feeling of guilt, but not enough to make a real difference.

Thus the Ephrons of the world are able to pat themselves on the back and feel that they are magnanimous just by making a grandiose offer. Once they feel good about themselves for making that offer they will have succeeded in silencing the quiet voice of the soul which wants to be heard and truly make a difference. They can then go back to their selfish default position.

Abraham's kindness was totally of a selfless nature. The Abrahams of the world are never content with making offers of assistance and kindness; they are focused totally on action; on translating their words into action.

Rebecca did not perform a perfunctory act of kindness. Neither did she limit herself to Eliezer's precise request. Rather, without fanfare or announcing her intentions, she went all the way. She thus demonstrated that she was a perfect match for Abraham's family.

Finishing the Job

There is yet another way of understanding this trait of saying little and doing much more. The first step in any venture is obviously the discussion of one's plan. Saying little and doing much more ensures that one is not content with just starting a project and leaving it for others to complete.

As we stand on the cusp of the Final Redemption, we must remember that what is most important now is finishing the task and bringing G-d's Master Plan to its conclusion.

The Talmud states that "A mitzvah is credited to the one who completes it." Judah, Joseph's brother, was criticized by the Talmudic Sages for saving Joseph from death but

not completing the act of saving him by returning him to his father.

Rebecca arguably gives us the most dramatic example of someone who could have very easily started to perform the act of kindness, by giving Eliezer some water, and then left. Instead she worked tirelessly and waited until every last camel had drunk its fill. This is more than just ideal kindness; it was a commitment to see a process reach its desired conclusion.

The Rebbe has stated repeatedly that we are the last generation of exile and we will be the first generation of Redemption. However, the lesson we learn from our Matriarch Rebecca is that we cannot feel content in knowing that we will, sometime in the future, be the first generation of Redemption. We cannot rest until we perform the ultimate act of kindness of bringing true peace to the entire world "Rebecca style." This means that we must add to our efforts to do one more Mitzvah until we bring about the Final Redemption!

ESSAY NINETEEN

PURIM IN CHESHVAN?

Our Sages declare, "Moses is the first redeemer and Moses will be the final redeemer."

This does not mean that Moses and Moshiach are the same person.

Rather, Moshiach's power and ability to redeem the Jewish nation, is derived from Moses.

Moshiach internalizes the soul of Moses and all the ideals with which he is identified.

ESSAY NINETEEN

PURIM IN CHESHVAN?

The Connection

This week's parsha—that follows the Akeidah-the binding of Isaac, where Abraham was prepared to sacrifice his son Isaac, passing his most important test—begins with the passing of Sarah.

The Midrash connects these two events. When Sarah was told of what was supposed to happen to her only son Isaac the shock was so great that her soul left her body. She never got the chance to hear that, in the end, Isaac was not sacrificed.

Cheshvan and Adar

The Midrash, commenting on the story of Haman's desire to have all the Jews annihilated, connects it with the passing of Sarah.

Haman considered all the months of the year to determine which one would be most suited for carrying out his

diabolical plan. Each month was disqualified by him because of something good that occurred in it that was favorable to the Jewish people. When he considered the month of Cheshvan—the month that we are in now and which has no Holidays—he dismissed it as well because Sarah's passing occurs in this month. Haman felt that her merit would shield the Jewish people.

The Midrash then states that after rejecting eleven of the twelve months because of their favorability to the Jewish people, he finally settled on the month of Adar. Haman concluded that Adar was an unlucky month for the Jewish people since Moses died in this month. Little did he know, the Midrash states, that Moses was also born in the month of Adar and that his birth would override the effects of it being the month in which he died.

The Differences Between Sarah's Passing and Moses' Passing

The obvious question here is why he felt that Sarah's passing in the month of Cheshvan would render that month a fortuitous month for the Jewish people and would afford them protection in her merit whereas Adar, the month of Moses' passing, would not afford them protection. Why was Moses' passing more of a negative phenomenon than Sarah's? And if the passing of a tzadik

generates positive energy, what is the difference between Sarah's passing and Moses' passing?

Commentators explain that in truth it is not that Sarah's passing was considered a good omen but rather it was the binding of Isaac that precipitated her demise that was the good omen. Haman was concerned that the self-sacrifice that Abraham and Isaac exhibited with the Akeidah would render his efforts futile. And since Sarah's passing resulted from her hearing about the Akeidah, it was considered to be an integral part and continuation of their self-sacrifice, thereby carrying within it the merit of the Akeidah.

Another answer to this question may be that Moses pleaded with G-d to be allowed to enter into the Eretz Yisrael and was turned down. This suggested to Haman that Moses' passing was a totally negative experience because Moses was unhappy about it.

At first glance, this answer can be challenged because Sarah's death, too, was tragic and untimely. As the Midrash, cited earlier, states , her passing was a result of the shock she experienced upon learning of the Akeidah. Obviously, the circumstances of her demise were also less than desirable. Why then did Haman think that her passing would be a source of strength and protection for the Jewish people while Moses' passing would prove to be detrimental to them?

Moses, the Power of Complete Redemption

The truth is that Moses' passing was not simply contrary to his expressed will. In the end, Moses was convinced that his place was actually with his generation in the desert. As the Midrash puts it, G-d told Moses that in the days of Moshiach he will arise with his flock and take them to Eretz Yisrael. His passing, therefore, was an act of supreme devotion to his people to not forsake them even in their deaths.

Nevertheless, Moses' passing and his inability to enter into the Land of Israel rendered the Jewish nation vulnerable to Haman's threat.

If Moses had entered the Land of Israel and had built the Beis Hamikdash-the Holy Temple- it would never have been destroyed and the Jews would not have been exiled to Persia.

Haman thus reasoned that the very fact that the Jewish people were in exile is attributable to Moses' passing. Thus, the month of Adar symbolized and contained within it the energy that undermines Jewish stability. There can be no better month, Haman thought, than the month of Adar, to further undermine Jewish existence.

Haman, of course, was wrong.

His mistake, the Midrash and Talmud state, was that Moses was also born in the month of Adar, and indeed on the very same day that he would die 120 years later. Moses birth, which introduced the soul of the one who would liberate the Jewish people, overrode the negative connotation of the day that he died.

How does his birth on that same day in the month of Adar ameliorate the negative effects of his passing?

Moses' birth introduced the very notion of and potential for liberation. Moses' soul was inextricably bound up with removing the shackles of golus=exile from the Jewish people. And that was what defined Moses' very existence and essence. Thus, the fact that he also died in that month, which enabled the subsequent exile, could not override his positive energy which negates the negative forces of exile.

Indeed, Moses personified the ideal of complete Redemption. As our Sages declare, "Moses is the first redeemer and Moses will be the final redeemer." This does not mean that Moses and Moshiach are the same person, but rather that Moshiach's power and ability to redeem the Jewish nation, is derived from Moses. Moshiach, internalizes the soul of Moses and all the ideals with which he is identified. Moses thus is the very engine of the future Redemption just as he was the engine of the first Exodus from Egypt. And as it turned out, Moses was also

the catalyst for the deliverance of the Jews from Haman's decree because it was scheduled for the month of Adar, the month in which the energies of Redemption were introduced into the world by virtue of it being the month in which he was born.

And while it is true that his passing made it possible for the Jewish people to degenerate and ultimately lose their Beis Hamikdash, it actually was, ironically, also responsible for their survival. If Moses would have entered the Land and built the Beis Hamikdash it would never have been destroyed, but by the same token, the destruction of the Beis Hamikdash, our Sages tell us, spared the lives of the people. G-d took out His wrath, so to speak, on the wood and stones of the Temple and not on the lives of the Jewish people.

In effect, Moses birth and his passing both served to preserve and protect the survival of the Jewish people. Therefore, the month of Adar was quite an auspicious month for them and Haman's plan was thus thwarted.

Harnessing the Power of Moses

The lesson for our times is it is through harnessing the power of Moses that we will bring an end to exile and its threats to the Jewish people. Moses personifies two complementary ideals:

Moses is the ultimate personification of Torah. Indeed, in Deuteronomy the Torah actually ascribes the Torah to Moses: "Moses commanded us the Torah as an inheritance to the assembly of Jacob."

But Moses is also the exemplar of Ahavas Yisroel, of total commitment to and willingness to sacrifice everything for the sake of the Jewish people.

These twin traits of Torah study and Ahavas Yisroel are thus the forces that we bring to bear that will not only temporarily delay the negative forces of golus—the Hamans of our own day that threaten us—but will finally and imminently bring the true and complete Redemption through Moshiach.

The Feminine Power of Cheshvan

In light of the above, one might entertain the notion that we have to wait for Adar to avail ourselves of Moses' power of redemption. In truth, however, even in this month of Cheshvan we are endowed with the power of the matriarch Sarah, whose passing occurred in this month and whose passing we read about in this week's parsha. And while Haman misconstrued the character of Adar by thinking that it would be an ominous time for the Jews, he had no such illusions about Cheshvan. He knew of the power that was vested in this month by Sarah.

This echoes the Talmudic statement that the Jewish people were redeemed from Egypt in the merit of the righteous **women** and will be redeemed from this exile in the merit of righteous women, as well. And whereas the righteousness of the men can sometimes be clouded, allowing the Haman's of the world to think that we are still vulnerable, they do sense that the righteous women are a more potent force of good and salvation for the Jewish people.

The feminine power of Cheshvan is further buttressed by the passing of the matriarch Rachel on the eleventh day of this month. It is she who cries for her children and refuses to take no for an answer. G-d tells her to refrain from crying because He has listened to her prayers and, as a result, "the children shall return to their borders."

Indeed, the word Cheshvan has the numerical value of Moshiach plus the letter vav, which is the letter of truth. This indicates that we want and expect the **true** and **complete** Redemption through our righteous Moshiach now, in the month of Cheshvan. At that time we will witness the dedication of the third Beis Hamikdash, which our Sages tell us was reserved for this month.

ESSAY TWENTY

GO EAST

In recent decades, many Jews have returned to Judaism, ironically, through exposure to Eastern mysticism.

Many Jews who have lost their appreciation for Jewish values and teachings and who were turned on by Eastern mysticism have subsequently discovered that they could find these mystical teachings in their original, unadulterated form in their own back yard.

ESSAY TWENTY

GO EAST

The Gifts Abraham Gave his Other Sons

Abraham is known to us as the father of the Patriarch Isaac. But Abraham was also the father of Yishmael and six other sons. Yet the Torah makes a sharp distinction between the way Abraham related to Isaac and his other seven sons. Before his passing, Abraham "gave all that was his to his son Isaac." To his other sons Abraham gave some token gifts and sent them eastward.

On the surface, the reason Abraham sent them away was to ensure that they would not make any claim to the land of Abraham that was reserved for the progeny of Isaac and Jacob exclusively.

But, according to the Zohar (the principal work of Jewish Mysticism— the Kabbalah) there was a deeper reason for sending them away that is linked to the nature of the "gifts" he had given them.

Our sages ask, what could Abraham have possibly given to his other sons, after having given everything he owned to

his son Isaac?

The Zohar's answer — alluded to in Rashi's commentary — is that Abraham did not give them material gifts but rather a spiritual one. Abraham had given them mystical and spiritual powers that they took with them to their eastern destination. This is where Eastern religions acquired their mystical tradition.

Spreading the Message

We can now appreciate why Abraham had sent them to the east, because Abraham wanted them to introduce a spiritual dimension to that part of the world. While the Jewish nation would eventually receive the Torah and spread throughout the "western world" and instill the spiritual dimension to the west, there was a need to prepare the eastern world as well.

To be sure, not everything that we find in Eastern religions can be attributed to Abraham's teachings. Indeed, some of the elements of Eastern religions fly in the face of Abraham's monotheistic teaching. The contribution of Abraham — through his sons — was to provide them with a spiritual basis so that they would have the ability to choose between paganism and an enlightened spiritual form of Monotheism. While most of these nations chose paganism over monotheism, they still retained some of the

salient characteristics of the spiritual dimension of Judaism that originated with Abraham. This, in turn, provides them with the opportunity to be ready for the time when all nations will serve one G-d' having been introduced to the spiritual underpinnings of Monotheism.

Indeed, Maimonides explains why G-d allowed the emergence of other religions which are based on erroneous theological foundations. It was to prepare the world for a time when the truth of G-d's oneness and the eternal nature of the commandments. By getting the world exposed to these ideas, even if they reject them, will allow them to appreciate the truth when it is exposed in the future Messianic Age.

Although Maimonides was discussing Western religions that broke away from Judaism, the same can be applied to Eastern religions. Their emphasis on spirituality, though misguided, will prepare them for the time when Divine spirituality will become the norm all of humankind will recognize the one G-d.

It's in Our Own Backyard

In recent decades, many Jews have returned to Judaism, ironically, through exposure to Eastern mysticism. Many Jews who have lost their appreciation for Jewish values and teachings and who were turned on by Eastern mysticism

have subsequently discovered that they could find these mystical teachings in their original unadulterated form in their own back yard.

In light of what the Zohar has said, there is yet another irony in what is occurring today. Abraham's gift of spiritual teachings to his sons whom he sent away to the east, has served as the channel for so many Jews of our times to return back to the teachings that were given by Abraham to his son Isaac and Jacob for the Jewish people.

The Zohar also tells us that the mystical teachings of Judaism will ultimately be popularized as a prelude and preparation for the Messianic Age. Though Judaism emphasizes the importance and preeminence of good actions over feelings and thoughts, nevertheless, Jewish life is incomplete without the combination of the two: The physical performance of Mitzvos and the spiritual feelings that imbue the actions with deeper meaning and life.

As we stand presently on the very threshold of the Messianic Age, when the mystical teachings of Judaism will be revealed to all, we are witnessing the proliferation of Jewish mystical teachings, throughout the world. While we must make sure that they are in harmony with the teachings of Torah, this proliferation augurs well for the future of the Jewish people and the entire world.

ESSAY TWENTY-ONE

GEULAH AND WOMEN

While the men think and talk about the imminence of Geulah, women will make it happen.

For men, Moshiach and Geulah are real *concepts* and real *ideas.*

For women, Moshiach and Geulah are reality, not just theories, concepts and ideas.

Without the concretization of the Geulah, women cannot be satisfied with just its promise.

The men, just as our father Abraham, owe their own commitment to the urgency and actualization of Geulah to the influence of the *nashim tzidkonyos*-righteous women of our generation.

ESSAY TWENTY-ONE

GEULAH AND WOMEN

Last Generation of Galus

The connection of Geulah-Redemption to women is firmly rooted in the teachings of our sages:

> "In the merit of the righteous women the Jewish people were liberated from Egypt." (Talmud, Sotah 11b).

The same has been said by the Rebbe about our generation - the last of Galus-exile and the first of Geulah - that it will be in the merit of the women. Indeed, according to the Arizal (*Sha'ar HaGilgulim Hakdamah*, 20) the last generation of Galus - our generation - is actually a gilgul-reincarnation of the generation of the exodus from Egypt.

The Emunah of Women

What is this special quality with which women have been endowed? In the simplest of terms it is their *emunah*-faith, which they possess in greater measure than men which did

not - in the past - and will not - in the future - let them give up in their push towards Geulah. Indeed, the Midrash (*Mechilta Beshalach* 14:31) attributes the exodus to the emunah of the Jewish people at large.

This does not contradict the statement of the Talmud that it is the merit of the women, for the women were the ones who instilled this emunah into the entire Jewish people.

In truth, as the Rebbe explained on several occasions, women do not possess *more* emunah than men, rather the intrinsic faith that each and every one of us possesses, can be accessed more easily by women. Women were endowed by Hashem with an enhanced capacity to manifest their inner feelings.

Where did the women get this ability to pierce through the barriers that do not allow the emunah of men to surface?

Inheritance from Sarah

It is reasonable to assume that it is an inheritance from the Matriarchs, particularly, the Matriarch Sarah - the first Jewish woman.

In the parsha Chayei Sarah, the only parsha named after a woman, the Torah encapsulates all that distinguished Sarah from all other people including her husband Abraham. As the Rebbe explained, the fact that the Parsha is named

Chayei Sarah, though it deals exclusively with her passing and events that transpired as a consequence of her departure, is an indication that all the events of the Parsha exemplify her life.

There are three pivotal events in this Parsha: a) the purchase of the *Me'aras Hamachpelah* (The Cave of Machpelah) for the burial of Sarah, b) the marriage of Yitzchak to Rivkah, c) the sending away of Yishmael and Abraham's other six sons. The first event connected Abraham and the Jewish people to the Land of Israel. The second and third events guaranteed Jewish continuity.

Let us reflect on the significance of the first event: the purchase of Me'aras Hamachpela. The Land of Israel was given to Abraham and his children by G-d. Yet, until the purchase of Me'aras Hamachpelah, Abraham did not assert his Divinely ordained right. Though there was no question as to the righteousness of his claim to the land, Abraham did not feel compelled to exercise his right.

Only as a result of Sarah's passing did Abraham speak firmly to the people of Cheis: "I am a stranger and a settler..." As Rashi observes that by adding the word "settler" Abraham intimated to the people of Cheis that if you will not let me purchase the land, I will invoke my right to it as a settler and take it by force. Sarah's influence, even posthumously, empowered Abraham to not

wait for the realization of G-d's promise in the distant or even near future, but to insist on its fulfillment without delay.

And with respect to the second and third events of this parsha, Abraham, without Sarah's influence, could have tolerated Yitzchak not becoming the exclusive heir to his special relationship with G-d. Consequently, there would not have been an eternal Jewish nation, the way we know it.

"The Time of You Redemption has Arrived"

We are living in a time where we have been told by Hashem, through his prophet, the Rebbe that "The time of your Redemption has arrived."

From the time the Rebbe made this declaration, he never qualified it or weakened its implication. On the contrary, with the passage of time, the Rebbe reinforced these words with statements such as "The Geulah is here, we just have to open our eyes." "We are already seeing a (sampling and) a beginning of the influence and effect of Moshiach on the nations," and similar pronouncements.

Yet, notwithstanding the clarity of the Rebbe's message, the women were the ones who appreciated and continue to

appreciate the urgency and the practical relevance of the Rebbe's words.

While the men, perhaps, can think and talk about the imminence of Geulah, the women are the ones who make it happen. For the men, without the influence of the women, Moshiach and Geulah are real *concepts* and real *ideas.* For the women, Moshiach and Geulah are reality, not just theories, concepts and ideas. Without the concretization of the Geulah, women cannot be satisfied with just its promise. The men, just as our father Abraham, owe their own commitment to the urgency and actualization of Geulah to the influence of the *nashim tzidkonyos*-righteous women of our generation.

Not only do the women view Moshiach and Geulah as concrete and tangible realty, but there is no room in their belief system for any other eventuality. The Sarah's of old and of new saw/see the eternal nature of the Jewish people and the inevitability and imminence of Redemption.

Yechi Hamelech!

It is no coincidence that during the same week that the Torah reading features Sarah's impact on Abraham, the Haftorah-prophetic reading features a woman who was the first and only person in Tenach to declare: "Yechi..l'olam-May my lord, king David live forever." Indeed, in the very

While the expression Yechi Hamelech-May the King live" itself can be found earlier at the anointing of King Saul and in other places, the addition of "*adoni*" (implying that he was *her* master etc.) and "l*'olam*" (meaning "forever,") can only be found in Biblical literature once. The one and only time it is used is here. Bas Sheva said it to King David.

The fact that it is recorded in the parsha of Chayei Sarah, which illustrates Sarah's contribution to the formation of the Jewish people, is instructive.

When the Jewish people was still in its nascent state, it was Sarah, the first Jewish woman, whose influence concretized the theoretical connection of Abraham to the Land of Israel. It was also Sarah's desire that Isaac (and not any of the Abraham's other sons) should inherit his legacy, ensuring the continuity of the Jewish people. Similarly, when the time arrived for the establishment of the Davidic dynasty for all eternity, paving the way to the Geulah, it was a woman who bestowed eternal life to Dovid, by her declaration of Yechi..l'olam.

Now that we stand at the end of that path, on the very threshold of geulah, the women are again the ones who stand in the forefront of the movement to accept Moshiach's sovereignty.

And it is the women, with their overt expressions of faith, who are the inspiration for all of us to cry out, *ad masi-*

how much longer! and yechi hamelech-May the king live, referring to Moshiach.

Moreover, the women's influence will not allow us to accept any compromise in our faith in the certainty and imminence of Moshiach's coming to redeem us.

ESSAY TWENTY-TWO

REVERSING ROLES: TWO EULOGIES

Sarah's inability to digest the loss of Isaac was more than just a motherly instinct. It was also a product of her utter devotion to the future of the Jewish nation.

She could not tolerate the notion that Isaac would disappear, not only because of her love for her only child born to her at the age of ninety. It was also motivated by the obsession she had with the future of the Jewish nation.

ESSAY TWENTY-TWO

REVERSING ROLES: TWO EULOGIES

Where did He Come From?

This week's parsha begins with the story of how Abraham buried his wife Sarah. The Torah states: "And Abraham came to eulogize Sarah and to weep for her."

The Midrash asks why the Torah mentions that he "came." From where did he come? The Torah should have simply stated that following the passing of Sarah Abraham eulogized her and wept for her. It seems that his coming from some unspecified location enabled him to eulogize his wife, or was the theme of his eulogy.

One answer, adopted by Rashi, is that he came from the binding of Isaac; the subject with which the preceding parsha concludes. When Sarah heard the report that her son was taken to be sacrificed, she collapsed and died. She did not have a chance to hear the end of the story that he had been spared. Thus, the narrative about the burial of

Sarah ties in directly with the narrative of the binding of Isaac.

Sensitive Sarah

Perhaps, the Torah sought to provide us with an understanding of Abraham's appreciation for Sarah, which he expressed in his eulogy.

The fact that Sarah expired when she heard of the purported death of her son does not seem to suggest that there was anything unique about Sarah. True, it shows that she was a good and sensitive mother, but couldn't that be said of most mothers?

Perhaps, Abraham's eulogy about Sarah addressed the fact that her inability to digest the loss of Isaac was more than just a motherly instinct. It was also a product of her utter devotion to the future of the Jewish nation. Sarah so zealously guarded her son Isaac from the threat that was posed to him from his brother Yishmael, how could she countenance the prospects of losing Isaac. She could not tolerate the notion that Isaac would disappear, not only because of her love for her only child born to her at the age of ninety. It was also motivated by the obsession she had with the future of the Jewish nation.

Abraham was also certainly devoted to the future of the Jewish people. Yet he did not resist the command of G-d to sacrifice his son, There was room in his mind for the possibility that he would not be the father of the Jewish nation after all, as inexplicable as that may have sounded to him. Sarah left no room in her mind for that possibility.

Thus, Abraham's eulogy was that Sarah was the true mother and founder of the Jewish people, She could not possibly live one minute with the possibility that Isaac was no more.

Terach's Funeral

There is yet another opinion in the Midrash that says that Abraham had come from the burial and eulogy of his father Terach. At the time of Sarah's passing Abraham was 137 year old and Terach—who was seventy years older than Abraham—had died two years earlier, when Abraham was 135 years old.

The question has been asked, what connection is there between the two events—the burial of Terach and the burial of Sarah, other than the fact that they were both burials?

Abraham rebelled against his father Terach in his youth. He rebelled against his idol worship and there was a major

rift between father and son. It is amazing that Abraham was able to convince thousands of pagans to abandon their ways and become monotheists. Why couldn't Abraham influence his own father?

Most would say that it is more difficult to influence your own family than it is to affect a total stranger. It is even more difficult for a child to show his parent that they have led wrong lives and to admit that they were wrong.

While that is definitely true in most cases, it is nevertheless hard to imagine that a man as holy and persuasive as Abraham who changed the world could not get his father to give up such nonsense as idol worship.

Our Sages tell us that, indeed, in the end of his life, Terach did mend his ways and abandoned idolatry. Obviously, it was Abraham's constant efforts that bore fruit in the end.

Connecting Eulogies

By juxtaposing the story of Abraham's eulogy of Terach—which undoubtedly contained words of praise about his Teshuvah (repentance and return), the Torah tells us that this eulogy was connected to another eulogy—the eulogy over his wife Sarah.

The reason for this parallel is to hint to us that although Abraham certainly deserved credit for having influenced his

father despite the inherent hardships in doing so, it was actually Sarah who provided Abraham with the inspiration to persevere and ultimately prevail. It was Sarah's unique ability to translate Abraham's ideals into reality and whose efforts crowned Abraham's work with success.

The first opinion that Abraham came from the binding of Isaac exemplifies Sarah's obsession with the future. The second opinion that describes Abraham's arrival from his father Terach's funeral demonstrates the ability Sarah possessed to influence the past generation as well. These two views might be arguing which of the two accomplishments is greater. Is it the ability to guarantee the future, or is it the ability to affect the past?

The Young Bringing Back the Elders

One of the prophecies of the Messianic Age is that the young will affect their elders. The last Biblical Prophet, Malachi, states: "He will restore the hearts of the fathers to [Rashi: through] the children."

Parents will react positively to the way their children discover the truth in Judaism and bring their parents back into the fold.

Where did this process of the yound influencing the old begin?

Abraham and Sarah were the first to introduce this reversal of roles—where the young influence and guide the old. It seems that in the final throes of the exile, the ability of the new generation to influence its elders is highlighted.